

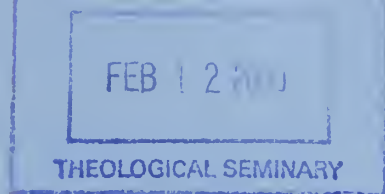
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VOLUME XXI NUMBER 1 NEW SERIES 2000



OPENING CONVOCATION

A Deepening Spiritual Awareness

THOMAS W. GILLESPIE

When Theology Matters: The Intersection of Theology
and Pastoral Ministry

DANIEL L. MIGLIORE

Henry Sloane Coffin and Charles R. Erdman
and Our Search for a Livable Piety

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Social Witness in Generous Orthodoxy: The New
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J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians*

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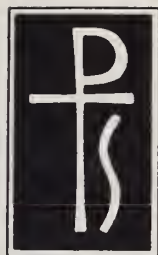
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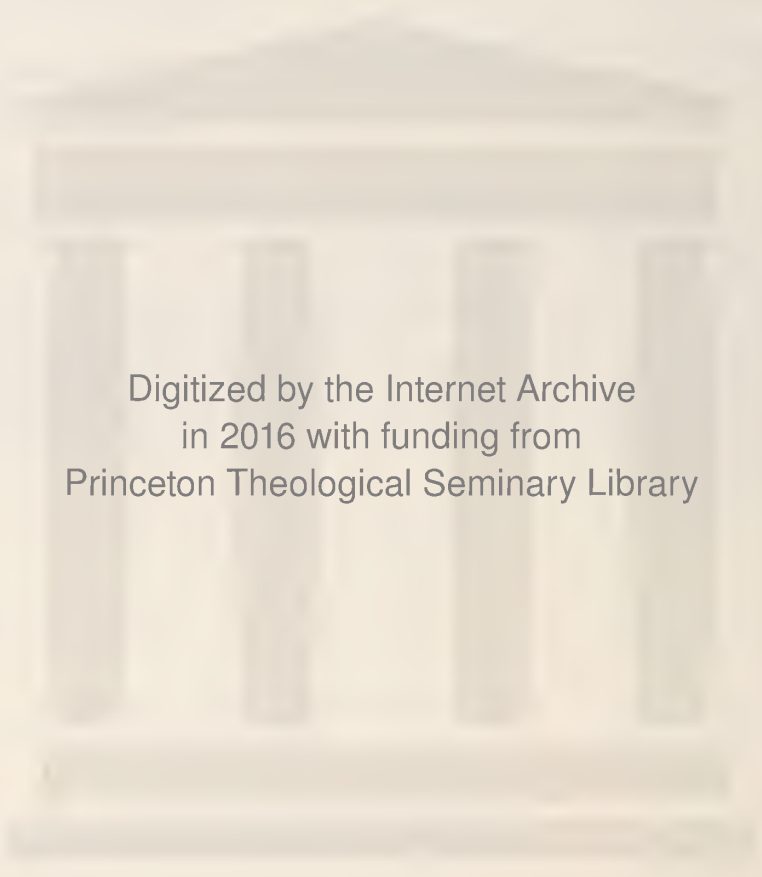
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A Deepening Spiritual Awareness

by THOMAS W. GILLESPIE

President Thomas W. Gillespie of Princeton Theological Seminary delivered this Opening Convocation Address on September 14, 1999, in Mackay Auditorium.

WHAT ARE WE UP TO in theological education? What are our curricular and pedagogical goals? What kind of educational program merits professional accreditation? These are strange questions to be asking as the seminary begins its 188th academic year. You might assume that by now we know the answers. And, of course, we do. Every single faculty member, student, administrator, trustee, and graduate knows the answers to these basic questions—his or her own answers! The need is to develop consensus within theological schools, as well as among them, regarding these fundamental issues. That is why we have regional and professional accrediting agencies that develop standards, prod us into self-evaluation on the basis of those standards, and conduct on-site evaluations every ten years to determine whether we are living up to them.

Consider the newly adopted standards of the Association of Theological Schools (ATS), the professional accrediting agency to which we belong, together with 236 other seminaries and divinity schools in the United States and Canada. There, under “Goals of the Theological Curriculum,” we find this summary statement:

In a theological school, the over-arching goal is the development of theological understanding, that is, aptitude for theological reflection and wisdom pertaining to responsible life in faith. Comprehended in this over-arching goal are others such as deepening spiritual awareness, growing in moral sensibility and character, gaining an intellectual grasp of the tradition of a faith community, and acquiring the abilities requisite to the exercise of ministry in that community. These goals, and the processes and practices leading to their attainment, are normally intimately interwoven and should not be separated from one another.¹

We do well to heed the concluding admonition to view the curricular task whole. But since it is impossible to think of everything at once or to talk about more than one thing at a time, I wish to focus our attention on the goal stated by the phrase *deepening spiritual awareness*. And this for three reasons. First, it is a new ATS standard. Second, it is an important standard (emphasized

¹ *Standards of Accreditation* 4.1 (*Bulletin* 43 Part 1, 1998).

elsewhere in the document under the rubric of "Personal and Spiritual Formation").² Third, it is the standard that most vexes us. So my intention is to look at this part of our stated task and then, through it, at the task as a whole.

I.

One cause of our vexation over this goal of deepening spiritual awareness is the term itself. Spiritual is at best a slippery word. By itself, it has the semantic value of an amorphous cloud. What counts as spiritual depends entirely upon the context in which the term is used. Take Brazil as an example. Do you know that there are spirits at the malls in Brazil? More precisely, there are spirits even at the malls in the world's largest predominantly Roman Catholic country. On a trip to Campinas for a pastors' conference, and later in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, we learned that spiritism is the fastest growing religious movement in that great South American land. This animistic belief that material objects are inhabited by good and evil spirits may be primitive in origin, but it is intellectually sophisticated and morally demanding in Brazil, appealing to people in all social locations. Perhaps this explains why there was a store in every mall we visited that offered nothing but spiritist literature, spiritist powders, and other spiritist paraphernalia. And these spiritist believers think of themselves as deeply spiritual people.

We were told that the challenge to all Christian churches in Brazil is not how to believe in and witness to the work of the Holy Spirit in a culture dominated intellectually by a secular materialism. Rather, it is how to hold that belief and bear that witness in a society awash religiously with spirits. In this regard, it is noteworthy that the most effective Christian response has come from the World Church, a charismatic communion that openly challenges spiritist belief in the name of the Spirit of God. For them, this is more than a theological exercise, it is spiritual warfare. For example, they photograph their ministers splashing in the water of a sacred pool or kicking a holy tree while defying the alleged indwelling spirits to harm them. Then they buy time on television and air the footage. The evangelistic results are remarkable. The point to note is, however, that at issue here is what counts as spiritual.

The situation of the Brazilian churches, however, is not all that dissimilar to our own. If their culture is flooded by divine spirits, it is equally the case that ours is inundated by New Age spirituality. As different as this movement or

² Ibid., A.3.1.3.

mood may be from spiritism, it represents the same challenge to the church's experience and understanding of the Spirit of God. Two American newspaper articles of recent vintage illustrate the North American spirituality phenomenon.

The first is from *The Charlotte Observer*.³ In its *Living* section, subtitled *Faith and Values*, an article appears under the headline: "Sacred Spaces: Individuals and Families in Search of Spirituality are Setting up Altars at Home." Staff writer Tim Funk reports as follows:

The collection of candles, sea-shells, feathers, rocks and cat whiskers sits atop a small bookcase near the end of a well-traveled hallway. Harmony Leonard and her two kids walk by it when they leave their house in Concord and when they come home.

Sometimes, they'll gather around, light the candles and give thanks for all they have.

They call it their home altar—a constant reminder of their connection to the rest of creation and to that higher power that lives within them.

"It's always there," Leonard, forty, says of the altar. "Just as my spirituality is always there."

The writer goes on to quote Peg Streep, author of *Altars Made Easy: A Complete Guide to Creating Your Own Sacred Space*: "It's about carving out places where you can acknowledge and get in touch with your spiritual self."

The second article was published by *USA Today* in its "Life" section.⁴ The headline reads, "The New Madonna: Pop Star Evolves from Material to Spiritual Girl." The occasion of this piece was the release of Madonna's first album in four years. Reporter Edna Gunderson writes: "Known for causing a commotion, Madonna is desperately seeking serenity. *Ray of Light*, out today, illuminates an icon disdainful of her earlier incarnations, newly immersed in spirituality and self-discovery."

She quotes Madonna as saying: "The thing that amazes me is people's obsession with my reinvention of myself . . . I am not reinventing myself, I am going through the layers and revealing myself. I am on a journey, an adventure that's constantly changing shape."

It would appear from these two reports that New Age spirituality is a quest for the spiritual self, a journey of self-discovery that, when successful, connects with that higher power that lives within. Is that what the ATS

³ Tim Funk, "Sacred Spaces: Individuals and Families in Search of Spirituality," *The Charlotte Observer*, January 17, 1998.

⁴ Edna Gunderson, "The New Madonna: Pop Star Evolves from Material to Spiritual Girl," *USA Today*, March 3, 1998.

standard has in mind when it mandates deepening spiritual awareness as a goal of the theological curriculum? The question is rhetorical, of course. The ATS spiritual formation standard does not expect its member schools to cultivate New Age spirituality in its students any more than its globalization standard intends us to appropriate Brazilian spiritism. This new standard does expect that given the diversity of member institutions, each school must (1) develop an understanding of spiritual awareness in accordance with its own faith tradition and then (2) implement it as a goal of its curriculum. For us here in Princeton, at a seminary of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), this will entail an understanding of the Spirit of God from the perspective of the ecumenical Reformed tradition.

II.

The Reformed theologian I turn to for help in understanding my own tradition on this matter is Michael Welker. Among the several recent treatments of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, I find his contribution the most insightful and provocative. Entitled *God the Spirit*, this seminal volume represents what the author calls “realistic theology.”⁵ By that is meant a theology that works both from above and from below. Welker’s strategy is to introduce the reader into “the contexts of the diverse testimonies to God’s Spirit that we find in the various biblical traditions” from the vantage point of “the broad spectrum of experiences of God’s Spirit, searches and quests for the Spirit, and skepticism toward the Spirit that define the contemporary world.” Welker’s thesis is that these diverse biblical testimonies are “firmly embedded in various life experiences,” that their complex “interconnections” are comprehensible, and that they refer us from their different perspectives to “the rich *reality and vitality of the Holy Spirit*.”⁶

What follows is not a review of this exhaustive study. I wish simply to focus on four points scored in the book that bear directly upon the ATS goal of deepening spiritual awareness.

First, Welker emphasizes the identity of the Spirit. What the scriptures refer to when they speak of God’s Spirit is neither the human spirit “writ large” nor what the Apostle Paul calls “the spirit of the world” (1 Cor 2:12). It is God’s presence and power at work within creation. That is what makes it the Holy Spirit. Moreover, despite the modern world’s perception of the distance if not the absence of God, the Holy Spirit is the vital reality of the

⁵ (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994).

⁶ *Ibid.*, ix-x. Emphasis in original.

God with whom we have to do. As Welker puts it: "God's Spirit, the Holy Spirit, is not only a power by which God once intervened in past worlds and made himself knowable. God's Spirit, the Holy Spirit, is also the power and the force by which God intervenes ever anew in the present world and gives himself to be known to present and future living people."⁷ God's Spirit, in other words, is his active presence in the world at any time and place, a presence that does not depend on human perception or recognition for its reality.

Second, Welker underscores the complexity of the Spirit's work. If we are to comprehend the biblical witness to the power of the Spirit at work in the dynamic, complex, and diverse structures of created reality, including human experience, we need an adequate conceptual model. Welker finds such a model in modern physics, in the concept of a "force field." The basic idea is that a field is constituted by elements that are themselves fields.⁸ Such fields may be compared to "a system differentiated into subsystems," or "a structure composed of structures," or a "network whose component parts themselves form nets." What necessitates such abstract concepts is the testimony of the biblical traditions. Welker insists that a "theology that does not wish to remain below the level of the biblical traditions' great powers of conception will have to learn again to work with such forms."⁹

The megadynamic of God's presence and power at work in the world is thus called "the force field of the Spirit." Because God's Spirit includes us in and makes us agents of this activity, Welker speaks also of "the force field of faith" and "the force field of hope." In point of fact, there are as many sub-fields as there are gifts of the Spirit (I Cor 12:4-11). As he explains:

Through such "gifts" or "gifts of grace" or charisms, God's Spirit gives human beings a share in the Spirit in such a way that they become members and bearers of this force field. The gifts of grace, the charisms, are elements of the force field of the Spirit, and at the same time they themselves constitute force fields, through which the action of the Spirit is realized and spread in the finite and shared life of human beings.¹⁰

So in our dealing with the Spirit of God, we are engaged in a dynamic and complex interaction of the human spirit with the Holy Spirit, on the one hand, as well as an equally dynamic and complex interaction of the human spirit with the created world.

⁷ Ibid., 4 (my translation from the original German).

⁸ Ibid., 239, n. 23.

⁹ Ibid., 240, n. 26.

¹⁰ Ibid., 240.

Third, Welker points to the community of the Spirit's labor. While acknowledging the diversity of the divine activity, Welker calls attention to an important emphasis of the Protestant Reformers, namely, that the work of God's Spirit results in neither pluralism nor individualism. Rather:

The action of the Spirit touches me as a concrete individual. Which is to say, as a human being with a specific background and language, from a specific country, a specific culture and landscape, and a specific natural and spiritual climate, with specific experiences and expectations, cares and notions of happiness, compunctions and experiences of success, perhaps at the moment calm, responsive, and open to the world, alert and healthy, or perhaps at the moment sick, tormented, closed, distrustful, out of sync with myself and with the world. The action of the Spirit touches me in the unique and irrepeatable concretization of this "here and now." . . . At the same time the action of the Spirit affects me *as well as all believers*, as well as the whole Christian church, as well as the whole community that streams together at Pentecost. It affects me as a member, as an element, as a representative and bearer of this community, but also as someone borne by this community.¹¹

Or, as the Apostle Paul put it to the church at Corinth, "Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it" (I Cor 12:27).

The fourth and final point has to do with the pedagogy of the Spirit. Perhaps it would be more accurate to speak of the Spirit as Pedagogue, as Teacher, or, to use Calvin's favorite term, as Schoolmaster. Here Welker picks up on the broad biblical testimony to the role of the Spirit in the creation and transmission of knowledge. The gifts of the Spirit, he observes, "all serve inclusion and participation in the knowledge of God mediated by the Spirit."

This knowledge unfolds in the knowledge of the divine Creator, the delivering Christ, and the liberating and enlivening Spirit. . . . Through the action of the Spirit, God and life in God's presence become known in a differentiated way. Knowledge of God and of the reality intended by God are made accessible.¹²

The claim that God becomes known through the Spirit is standard theology, but the assertion that the Spirit illumines "life in God's presence" is an important insight. When Welker states that the knowledge "of God and of

¹¹ Ibid., 247.

¹² Ibid., 241.

the reality intended by God” are made accessible through the agency of the Spirit, that *reality* is the creation itself. This is not to imply that the Spirit does science for us, for example. It means rather that by mediating the knowledge of God to us, “the Spirit enables reality to be perceived from the perspective of God’s presence.”¹³ That sheds new light on both scientific theory and discovery.

III.

These four points present a view of God’s Spirit that raises critical questions for me about the goals of theological education. To begin with, what would a *deepening spiritual awareness* signify in such view? And if the answer is that it would denote an ever-increasing consciousness of God’s active presence in the world, an awareness that entails both participation in and service to the Spirit’s powerful work, then the next question concerns what theological education as a *whole* looks like when viewed through the lens of this *part*.

Consider the issue of context. We are sensitive to the influence of cultural factors upon theological education, as we should be. We are also aware of how race, gender, and ethnicity can affect theological perspectives and convictions, and rightly so. So let us push the envelope further. What difference would it, could it, should it make in our understanding of what we are doing here as faculty and students if we were more keenly aware that theological education is profoundly contextualized within “the force field of the Spirit?”

If such is in fact the case, how does the communal character of the Spirit’s work shape our self-understanding as students and faculty? What is required of those who learn as members of a student body? Or what does it mean to teach and do research as professors on a faculty? How do our scholarly disciplines, curricular departments, and professional guilds serve the Spirit’s strategy of working through the individual for the sake of the community?

Perhaps most important of all, what is the significance of the claim that the Spirit effects the knowledge of God that in turn illumines the reality of creation? Peter Hodgson suggests one possibility in his new book, *God’s Wisdom: Toward a Theology of Education*. His thesis is that religion lies at the heart of all education.

The sort of theological claim I would like to make is this: God “teaches” through the “educing,” or leading-forth, of the human spirit into the widest range of its potentialities. Through the interaction of Spirit and spirit, the possible

¹³ Ibid., 101.

becomes actual, the ideal becomes real, truth becomes known, beauty takes shape, the good enters into practice. This is the work of God's Spirit.¹⁴

Another possibility, and closer I think to what Welker has in mind, is advocated by our own colleague, James Loder, in his latest book, *The Logic of the Spirit*. Developing an insight of T. F. Torrance into the relationship between theology and the sciences, Loder argues the following case:

The natural order is not the context in which to understand God, but the natural order must itself be understood in the context of what God has revealed. By this theological paradigm shift, the science of the natural order, including the human sciences, must undergo a transformation by which they enter into an indissoluble, contingent relation to revealed theology, functioning as subspecies of its inner intelligibility and as an essential part of the empirical and theoretical claims of its interpretation of God's action in the world.¹⁵

Either one of these proposals is good for a long evening's argument, but both are worthy of such if it is true that God's Spirit is active in the knowing, learning, and teaching processes. If not this or something like it, then what?

Let me frame these questions by telling a silly story that makes a serious point. A ten-year-old boy and his eight-year-old brother were constantly causing their parents a great deal of grief. Mischievous would be a polite description of them, although trouble would be the more accurate term. Finally, in desperation, the mother says to the father, "There is a new pastor at the church who is reputed to be very good with youngsters. Do you think we should take the boys to see him?" "Well," replied her husband, "better that than I throttle the both of them." An appointment was made and the family arrived together at the church. The young minister greeted them warmly and then asked if he could visit with the boys separately. So the eight-year-old went into the pastor's office first. Seating the boy in a comfortable chair, the pastor asked him warmly, "Son, do you know where God is?" The lad's eyes widened and his lips tightened, but he made no reply. More firmly the minister asked a second time, "Do you know where God is?" The boy's eyes widened further and his lips tightened more firmly. Somewhat exasperated by this silence, the pastor shook his finger and said forcefully, "Young man, do you know where God is?" At this, the boy jumped up, bolted from the room, ran through the reception area and out the door with his older

¹⁴ (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 6.

¹⁵ James E. Loder, *The Logic of the Spirit: Human Development in Theological Perspective* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 32-3.

brother in hot pursuit. The two of them ran all the way home, jumped into a closet and shut the door. In the darkness, the ten-year-old asked the eight-year-old, "What happened in there?" The eight-year-old replied, "God's missing, and they're blaming us."

The serious point is this. Could it be that God is missing in theological education and that we, teachers and students alike, are responsible? Not that I think God is actually absent from the scene, although we have been told that the Spirit, like the wind, "blows where it wills" (John 3:8) and therefore is not subject to presumption. But God's presence in power, the work of God's Spirit, can be missing from our *awareness*, in which case we do not deny the divine activity, we simply ignore it. We do not bracket it out in our piety, only in our academics. That is to say, we do not expect the Spirit to be a participant in the educational experience. If we do that, however, do we not interrupt the interaction that characterizes the essential relation between the "force field of faith" and the "force field of the Spirit?" The educational consequences of such an interruption are clearly disastrous if the role of the Spirit is that of our Teacher.

I am enough of a Calvinist, of course, to believe that God's Spirit works in us and among us even when we are unaware of that divine activity. Yet the apostolic exhortations not to "quench the Spirit" (1 Thess 5:19) or "grieve the Holy Spirit of God" (Eph 4:30) make me nervous. The implication would seem to be that the Spirit works with greater ease and perhaps even greater effectiveness when we consciously expect it, long for it, and rely upon it. So I infer that it is not impossible that God is missing from theological education and that we are responsible for it.

IV.

I am aware that I have presented more questions than answers in this address, but I trust you see the point. My conviction is that the ATS goal of *deepening spiritual awareness* in theological education is essential to the "over-arching" task of developing "theological understanding" in terms of "aptitude for theological reflection and wisdom pertaining to responsible life in faith." I am seriously contending that the other sub-goals of "growing in moral sensibility and character," of "gaining an intellectual grasp of the tradition of a faith community," as well as "acquiring the abilities requisite to the exercise of ministry in that community" are dependent upon our awareness of the "force field" of the Spirit of God that is the context of our life in faith as well as our academic task. What I am trying to overcome is the

now age-old dichotomy in our Western intellectual tradition between the mind and the heart, between academics and piety, between knowledge and faith. The Spirit of God, I am convinced, is the source of both. That does not make our academic work the equivalent of divine worship, but it does make our studies a form of divine service. To that service, let us commit ourselves as we begin the 188th academic year of Princeton Theological Seminary.

When Theology Matters: The Intersection of Theology and Pastoral Ministry

by DANIEL L. MIGLIORE

Daniel L. Migliore is Charles Hodge Professor of Systematic Theology. This address was given as part of Alumni Day, May 20, 1999, in Stuart Hall. His latest book (with Kathleen D. Billman) is Rachel's Cry: Prayer of Lament and Rebirth of Hope (1999).

NOT LONG AGO a seminarian said to me: "I often experience a huge gap between my seminary studies and my life outside the seminary. It's like living in two worlds, and I don't know how to put them together."

The student went on to explain how difficult it was for him to hear people talking almost casually in a seminary classroom about the call to a holy life. As a recovering alcoholic, he knew he was far from holy and struggled hard just to make it through each day. He told me that the most important support in his daily struggle came not from his seminary classes, nor from the church services he attended, but from the meetings of a support group outside the church. He was frustrated because there was no opportunity to deal explicitly with his personal struggle either in seminary or in church, while in his support group he sensed there was little interest in his Christian convictions. So he felt like a stranger and alien in both worlds, with no place to talk about the intersection of his deepest convictions and his personal struggles.

Another student recently told me her own version of the experience of disconnection between theology and ministry. She works with a social agency in an inner city and helps to arrange for decent housing at affordable costs for lower income families. Like the first seminary student, she too wonders how to forge a link between theology and life, between her commitments to a ministry of proclamation, care, justice, and renewed life in inner-city situations, and her seminary theology studies that often seem strangely distant from the kinds of concerns and struggles that are part of a ministry with the homeless and the hungry.

With variations, these stories could be multiplied many times over. I recount them not because I think the Princeton Seminary curriculum is in crisis—although there is always room for improvement in any curriculum. Rather, I think the stories I have told are worthy of our attention because they point to a real difficulty experienced not only by many seminarians but also by many pastors and members of congregations. For many people in the church,

there is an acute sense of distance between theology and life. In recent years, we have all become familiar with the declaration, "theology matters," and have probably nodded our heads in agreement when we heard or read it. But just why and how theology matters in the day-to-day practices of Christian life and ministry are not always very clear. If we are honest, we would probably say that, in fact, some ways of engaging in theology do not matter very much at all to us. In other words, the claim, "theology matters" needs some qualification. Whether theology matters depends on what kind of theology we are talking about.

Most pastors would agree that the kind of theological reflection congregations need—the kind that can be of help to Christian congregations and their leaders—must be closely related to Christian life and ministry. And that means it must be deeply contextual. A theology that matters will not exist in the stratosphere above the heads and lives of people struggling to be faithful in their everyday existence. It will be informed by the actual contexts of life in which Christian people find themselves.

Of course, good theology will always be more than a mere echo of its context. The Word of God is far more than a rehearsal of current trends. A responsible Christian theology, certainly in the Reformed tradition, must be grounded in scripture. Again, a responsible theology in the Reformed tradition will be instructed by the classical creeds and confessions of the church.

Yet if the ministry of the Word is to address people in a genuinely pastoral and prophetic way it must know and share the issues and crises Christians face in the here and now. In this sense, good theology has always been contextual. That is already evident in scripture where we find many different accents and emphases of prophets and apostles who address the Word of God to people in particular situations of life. The contextual character of theology is also apparent in the history of Christian doctrines, creeds, and confessions. One need only think of the many different concepts and metaphors that have been employed at various times and places to interpret such doctrines as the atoning work of Christ or the nature of the church.

Far from being opposed to a strong biblical and confessional theology, taking context seriously is an inseparable part of our responsibility to the biblical witness and the confessions of the church. As a rule, pastors know far better than academic theologians that the biblical message and the confessional heritage of the church must be brought into ever new relationship with the lived experience and concrete conditions of the people of God in particular times and places.

I.

If theology matters when it is a strong biblical, confessional, and contextual theology in the sense I have defined, we must then go on to ask: What *is* the context in which the church and ministry find themselves today? There are many possible answers to this question because the contexts of ministry vary widely. They may be quite different even within the boundaries of a particular congregation or presbytery at a given time. Still, I think we can point to some prominent common elements present in all our contexts of Christian ministry today. I will name four, but would quickly concede that my inventory is not exhaustive.

The first common element of our ministerial context today is what might be called *the moral warfare between fundamentalism and relativism in our culture*. As you have surely heard, many philosophers and theologians speak of our present era as the postmodern age. I do not want to get bogged down in trying to identify all the possible meanings of this notoriously fuzzy notion. I will only say that, by any definition of the term, one of the things that is characteristic of the postmodern era is a sharp decline in confidence that we can know what is objectively true and good. The result of this loss of confidence is that we are tempted by relativism in all areas, including and especially, religious and moral life.

Why is moral relativism a challenge to Christian ministry? Surely one answer to that question is that it is impossible to read the Bible seriously without being confronted by the judgment of God on certain actions and ways of life. Could we claim to be Christian—indeed, would we still be human—if we were no longer morally outraged by certain events? What would we have become if we no longer had the courage to declare immoral and reprehensible such events as the killing of six million Jews in the holocaust, or the destruction of life caused by the institution of slavery in North America, or what happened under the apartheid system in South Africa, or the policy of “ethnic cleansing” in the Balkans and in other areas of the world? What would we have become if we were not shaken and horrified by the evil of the massacre at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado? To say we are compelled to name these events evil is quite different from saying that while we do not personally approve of such behaviors, we allow that the people who engaged in them evidently felt they were justifiable or necessary under the circumstances. Such moral relativism is a recipe for social disaster, not to mention being totally at odds with the biblical witness. Yet the context of church and ministry today is one in which moral relativism is very much alive.

The Christian church has a crucial role to play in this situation, and our task

is unmistakably theological. It is becoming increasingly clear that basic moral values are severely weakened when they are divorced from religious convictions. Enlightenment philosophers and statesmen—including some of the founders of our nation—thought it was possible to disengage moral values from religious convictions. One of the aims of the Enlightenment project was to build a morally cohesive society based on reason alone, divested of any strong or explicit religious support. At the end of the twentieth century, that project looks less and less credible.

But if we find ourselves faced with a postmodern slide into moral relativism on the one hand, we are confronted on the other hand by resurgent fundamentalisms in our society and in other societies around the world. Fundamentalisms of all sorts feed on the fear of relativism. They claim to possess absolute truth and cannot tolerate any talk of complexity and ambiguity in dealing with religious doctrines or moral issues. Fundamentalisms can be as dangerous to the flourishing of human life that God intends as religious and moral relativism. The most destructive social and political movements of our century—Nazism, Stalinist communism, state-enforced racism—have been absolutist and totalitarian in character and, objectively viewed, share many features of the fundamentalist mentality.

For Christians in a time of moral warfare between relativism and fundamentalism, the central theological question is how to relate *the law of God and the gospel of God* in our pastoral relationships and in our response to public issues of our time. Martin Luther once said, if you can rightly distinguish and properly relate law and gospel, you are a good theologian. From a theological perspective, there are basically two dangers we face in upholding both the distinction and the relation of law and gospel in a time when moral consensus seems to be increasingly precarious.

One danger is to proclaim what Bonhoeffer called cheap grace, a gospel without any demands, forgiveness without real repentance. When this happens, grace and responsibility are severed. The other danger is to fall into a rigid and even vindictive legalism that destroys the message of grace, forgiveness, and promise of new life in Jesus Christ. In my conversation with one of the seminarians mentioned earlier, it was very clear that he needed to hear both the gospel *and* the call to holiness. He did not deny that he needed to hear God's call to a disciplined and responsible life. Yet there was a strange absence of the gospel in what he was hearing in seminary and church, and the demands of the law only increased his sense of unworthiness and self-condemnation. In a time of moral chaos, it is very tempting either to reduce the meaning of the gospel to a cheerful, "I'm ok, you're ok," or to lean so

heavily on the law in our proclamation and education that the gospel is obscured.

If it is difficult to uphold law and gospel in our personal life and in our ministry with individuals, it is even more difficult to know how to translate this relationship properly into the public domain. The recent work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa illustrates how important and yet how difficult it is to keep law and gospel together in the profound entanglements of social life without allowing one to swallow the other. How do we take seriously the demands for justice in cases of outrageous abuse and yet work at the same time for peace and reconciliation? Conversely, how do we responsibly proclaim and live out a gospel of reconciliation without weakening or even negating the seriousness of the struggle for justice?

Christians of the Reformed tradition approach this question of justice and reconciliation, law and gospel, with a distinctive emphasis. God's law is certainly to be honored and obeyed. The Reformed tradition has always upheld the authority of Old and New Testaments and, in its preaching and teaching, has esteemed the Decalogue as well as the Sermon on the Mount. But while gospel and law are understood as inseparable in Reformed faith and theology, priority is given to the good news of the grace of God in Jesus Christ. Reformed Christians read scripture as bearing witness to God's intention that human life be lived in covenantal community with God and others. Accordingly, they affirm that the law has its proper place and meaning in relation to God's gracious purposes decisively disclosed in Jesus Christ. They hold that the grace of God proclaimed in the gospel is never cheap, and that the purpose of God's law is never vindictiveness.

The practical question in all this is where and how people are schooled in a moral sensibility that properly holds together law and gospel, justice, and reconciliation. We are increasingly realizing that such schooling takes place, if at all, in congregations: in the life of communities of faith that tell and retell the story of God's faithful relationship to the world realized above all in Jesus Christ and that engage in the regular practices of worship, prayer, mutual forgiveness, and the bearing of one another's burdens. Congregations are, of course, far from perfect, yet they are of crucial importance because they are the concrete locations where fitting responses to God's righteous love are practiced and become habits of the heart. Christians learn to be moral as they are shaped by the gospel of Jesus Christ and the law of God interpreted by this gospel. This takes place within a particular congregational context and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. As Christians, our respect for others and our

responsiveness to their needs are not based on the supposed innate goodness of human beings or on utilitarian considerations. They are expressions of thanksgiving for God's unfathomable love for us all in Jesus Christ. We learn what this means and how this is lived out by engaging in all the practices that make up Christian life together in congregations.

In a time when grace sometimes seems cheap and justice sometimes seems indistinguishable from vengeance, theology matters because we are called to proclaim and embody gospel *and* law, reconciliation *and* justice in all areas of human life. The grace of God frees and transforms life both personally and socially and calls us to responsibility and just dealings with our neighbors. Helping to make that clear today is the task of a theology and ministry rooted in congregational life. Theology really matters when it serves the formation of Christian character and Christian moral sensibility in a culture endangered by the absolutism of the right and the relativism of the left.

II.

A second element of our present context of ministry is the *new quest for spirituality*. There is a quest and a hunger for spiritual vision and purpose in the lives of countless people today. One of the most frightening things about the Littleton, Colorado atrocity is what it says about the spiritual life—or lack of it—of all too many youth in our society. The young men who committed the crime were apparently ordinary young Americans who lived in an upscale suburb, had caring parents, and were given all the advantages of good schooling and the resources of advanced technology. Whatever may have triggered their anger and hatred, they exhibited a terrifying disregard of the value of the lives of others and of their own lives. Their act of wanton violence had the marks of nihilism, and it should make us tremble.

Some might argue that if the lives of many people in our culture are spiritually empty, we should welcome and encourage everything that goes under the name of spirituality today. But as scripture says, we have to “test the spirits” and not allow ourselves to be driven to and fro by the latest spirituality fad. While the surge of interest in spirituality offers many opportunities for ministry absent only a few decades ago, there are also many hazards in the new spirituality boom. A central theological question for pastors today, therefore, is what is authentic spirituality? I think the Christian answer must be, authentic Christian spirituality is a christocentric or incarnational spirituality.

Theology matters when we seek to test the spirits to see if they are from God. According to 1 John 4:2, the criterion of Christian spirituality is that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh. *Christian faith centers on the coming of God*

into the depths of our human condition. Incarnation means the enfleshment of God. One of Luther's rules of theological reflection was: "The deeper we can draw Christ into the flesh the better it is." The God who created us body and soul cared so much about us as embodied creatures that God took on our flesh and wrought our salvation in it. Because Christian spirituality finds its center in the Incarnation and atoning work of Jesus Christ on the cross, it stands opposed to every dualism of soul and body. It also opposes every Manichean division of humanity into the godly and the righteous ("us") and the ungodly and the unrighteous ("them"). A Christian spirituality is a worldly spirituality, and it is an inclusive spirituality that reaches out to strangers and to those who are called enemies.

In Toni Morrison's novel, *Beloved*, there is a beautiful witness to the importance of embodied life, of the value of human flesh in the eyes of God. One of the characters in the novel, Baby Suggs, is an old African American woman who, in the years following the civil war, preaches to members of her despised and abused community a message of affirmation and hope. Proudly holding her weathered brown arms high, she says,

"Here, in this here place, we flesh, flesh that weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in grass. Love it. Love it hard. Yonder they do not love your flesh. They despise it. They don't love your eyes; they'd just as soon pick em out. No more do they love the skin on your back. Yonder they flay it. And O my people, they do not love your hands. Those they only use, tie, bind, chop off and leave empty. Love your hands! Raise them up and kiss them. Touch others with them, pat them together, stroke them on your face 'cause they don't love that either. You got to love it, you!"¹

One of my quarrels with a number of the current spirituality movements is that they do not seem to know the importance of loving the flesh of humanity and especially of wounded and marginalized people. They do not love the flesh hard like God has loved it in Jesus Christ. They split apart the saving of souls and the healing and rejuvenation of our embodied existence and our corporate life together as created and redeemed by God. It is apparent, therefore, that the issue of authentic Christian spirituality is a deeply theological matter. Those who think they can play off the importance of spirituality against a theology of Incarnation, cross, Resurrection, new creation, and new community are like the blind leading the blind. If the gospel is our guide, we need to be able to say in the spirit of Baby Suggs and with the far greater authority of Jesus Christ: "Love this flesh, this black, red, brown, white flesh,

¹ Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (New York: Knopf, 1998), 103-4.

love it hard, because it belongs to God and in Jesus Christ God has purchased it with his own blood."

I suspect that theology would matter more for the seminarian I mentioned earlier who is involved in inner-city ministry if she could be helped to see that the passion she has for this ministry is at its best a sign and witness of God's astonishing love of frail, broken human flesh in Jesus Christ. I suspect that theology would matter more for the other seminarian recovering from alcohol addiction if he could be helped to see that the grace of God does not distance itself from flesh in bondage to addictions but works at great cost to release us from all forms of bondage. Dependence on alcohol is only one of the many addictions that can ruin human life. Racism, gay bashing, and the spirit of revenge also have the force of addictions though they may not often be thought of in those terms. Love this flesh—this flesh subject to bondage and addiction—love it hard. If saying that is a way of speaking of the incarnate love of God in Jesus Christ, it points to a theology, a ministry, and a spirituality that really matter.

III.

A third element of our present context of ministry is the *search for community*. We have heard a lot in recent years about the breakdown of American families and the weakening of many of our civic and communal institutions, including the once mainline churches. Institutions that once helped to provide stability and coherence in our society are in trouble. Some sociologists have emphasized the power of individualism in our society and have described the loneliness of many people in a fast changing, technologically driven culture like ours. Other researchers have gathered evidence to show that Americans really do yearn for connection and community and in fact join a staggering number of diverse groups and organizations. While many of these groups primarily serve the personal interests of their members, a surprising number of them offer opportunities for their members to express concern for the welfare of others.

The search for community in our pluralistic society makes it urgent that the church be very clear as to what kind of community it is and what kind of community it offers to others. This means *the doctrine of the church is one of the most important theological issues in our time*. What is distinctive about the church? What is its basis? What is its character? What is its mission? These are fundamentally theological questions. While sociologists, anthropologists, historians of religion, and other researchers can provide descriptions of the church that may be important for us to read, for believers the question of

the nature and mission of the church is an inescapably theological question: What is the nature and mission of the church as described by the Word of God?

The importance of ecclesiology has not always been recognized, at least not always by Protestants. For Presbyterians, the new interest in ecclesiology has been precipitated in no small part by the decline of church membership that our denomination has experienced in recent decades. We can no longer take the church, its nature, mission, and perhaps even its future, for granted. There is among us an understandable fear for the future of our denomination and certainly for many of the smaller congregations of our denomination.

The Reformed tradition has long offered a distinctive answer to the question of the nature and mission of the church in the world. Reformed ecclesiology is rooted in the doctrine of the sovereign, electing grace of God. Rightly understood, of course, election means not election to privilege but election to service.

Princeton is the location of one of the great universities of the world. The motto of that university is "Princeton in the service of the nation." It is worth asking where this idea of public service at the very core of the self-understanding of a world-renowned university came from. Does it have anything to do with the fact that Princeton University grew in the soil of a Presbyterian heritage with its intense sense of vocation and service in the world for the greater glory of God? Such an understanding of vocation and service *ad gloriam Dei* has come on hard times not only in the wider culture but even in Presbyterian circles.

It hardly needs to be said that the so-called mainstream denominations like the Presbyterian church no longer have the public voice and influence they once did in American society. From this fact, some theologians conclude that the idea of the church as an instrument of God's work for social renewal as well as personal transformation must be given up. According to them, formerly mainstream churches should now recognize their minority status and learn to live and bear their witness as resident aliens in a foreign land.

There is some truth in this position, and I respect its representatives. I agree that personal and corporate Christian identity needs to be strengthened. I agree further that preaching and hearing of the Word of God, celebration of the sacraments, and sharing in the gifts of the Spirit of Christ cannot be neglected or replaced by concern for social relevance. I also agree that the quality of corporate Christian life bears its own important witness to the surrounding world. Having said this, however, we must go on to say that the church exists not simply for itself but also for the world that God has created

and wills to save. So I worry about an ecclesiology that turns inward and becomes so preoccupied with preserving identity that it loses the vocation of service to the world. No doubt we need to get beyond thinking of the place of the church in society today in Constantianian, imperial, and triumphalist terms. No doubt we need to relearn what it means to be a church of the cross, a church that can say with the apostle Paul that the weakness of God is stronger than all human powers (1 Cor 1:25).

But all this cannot mean for Reformed Christians that the day of our social witness and social responsibility is over. Our context calls for renewed mission, not despair over mission. Among other tasks, mission in our time means a call to reach out to our inner cities and to the many thousands of new immigrants in American society. We disregard our missionary mandate if we confine our outreach to people who are more traditionally Presbyterian in profile. As for influencing public policy and the ethos of the larger society, I think there will always be a countercultural dimension in authentic Christian life and ministry. But there are opportunities not only to set ourselves against the surrounding world but also to cooperate with all who seek greater justice and peace in our common life.

I sense that not a few Presbyterians are losing confidence that we are called to act as well as pray and hope as a community called to participate in God's great drama of world-transformation. It is therefore time for a church-wide discussion about our role as a Reformed community of faith in a pluralistic, postmodern world, where we can no longer assume that our voice will gain an immediate hearing and where our influence on public policy may not match what it once was, or what we think it once was.

IV.

The final factor of our context of ministry today that I will mention is the *clash of different interest groups in the church and in the larger society*. Differences of gender, race, ethnicity, and class have become major topics in both church life and public policy. Because of past and present injustices, these differences are the basis of power struggles, and they can sometimes lead to a spirit of bitterness, desire for retaliation, and recourse to violence.

That means the context of ministry today is very complex indeed. On the one hand, we find ourselves in the midst of a globalization process that is bringing the peoples of the world into ever closer contact with each other. On the other hand, we are faced with the continuing reality of deep suspicions and entrenched animosities between people who are in important ways different from each other. Are we simply to celebrate globalization when, as my

Princeton colleague John Mbiti says, the process of globalization is for some peoples of the earth like a huge steamroller that threatens to flatten out all the riches of the world's cultures? Conversely, are we simply to celebrate diversity and refuse to recognize the fact that the clash of different cultures and histories often brings hatred and warfare in its train?

One of the best recent books to address the topic of ethnic, racial, and gender differences from a theological perspective is Miroslav Volf's *Exclusion and Embrace*.² A prominent thesis of the book is that no place in the world today is immune from the real or potential clash of peoples of different races and cultures. We are suspicious of the "other," the stranger, those who are in some way different from us. Christians may know they are commanded to show hospitality to strangers (Heb 13:2), but that is easier said than done. Can there can be any more contemporary theological issue than welcoming those who are different from us? If theology does not matter here, does it matter anywhere?

In my judgment, there are at least two wrong ways of trying to handle this key issue of our time as it bears on strategies and programs of the church's ministry. One way is to say: Let's capitalize on the homogeneity of our congregations. After all, people feel comfortable around people who are like them. They feel uncomfortable around people who are different from them. So why don't we simply gear our evangelistic outreach and our church-growth strategies to take account of this incontestable fact of human experience?

The other approach is to pretend that differences are easily reconciled, that they do not create serious confrontations and conflicts. The solution proposed by this approach is something like: Let's welcome all sorts of people into the church but let's avoid all difficult and honest dialogue about the real differences among us and what we can do about them.

Neither of these approaches seems to me justifiable on the basis of the biblical witness. If we are commissioned to proclaim the gospel to all people; if Jesus Christ lived, died, and was raised for us all; if the table of the Lord is open to people from east, west, north, and south; and if the Spirit of Pentecost is the Spirit of God that miraculously brings together people of different languages, nations, cultures, and traditions; then it is clear that we cannot go either the way of homogeneity or the way of fearful suppression of the real differences among us.

A contemporary social theorist, Francis Fukuyama, argues that the indis-

² Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996).

pensable contribution of religious faith to society is that it helps expand the radius of trust and care that is often found in kin-groups to wider circles of life and eventually to all humanity.³ I do not think Christian theology should attempt to justify the existence of the church on simply pragmatic grounds. Nevertheless, Fukuyama's way of putting the matter is an important challenge to the church and theology today. What is the promise and summons of the Christian gospel today as it bears on the clash of different people threatened by their deep differences? The apostle Paul declares that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female (Gal 3:28). What does a church look like that really takes that promise seriously?

Today we find ourselves in search of a fresh understanding of our unity in Christ that is something other than uniformity. Instead of confirming our tendencies toward sameness and exclusivity, unity in Christ includes rich diversity. For some years now, I have been emphasizing in my classes and in my writings *the profound importance of a trinitarian doctrine of God* for our understanding of Christian community and Christian mission today. We worship a God who is not a *deus solitarius* but the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the power who makes for reconciled community without destroying those differences that enrich community. Trinitarian doctrine is thus of tremendous relevance to our particular social and cultural context at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

There can be little doubt that pluralism will increasingly define the context of Christian ministry in the new millennium. The whole world is moving inexorably toward multicultural and multiethnic societies. That movement will pose great challenges to the United States, Yugoslavia, Ireland, South Africa, and Rwanda, and indeed to all the nations of the world in the new century. As a worldwide community with a world-encompassing gospel of the triune God, the Christian church has a calling and a mission, both of word and deed, that are of incalculable significance for the healing of the nations.

V.

In these reflections on the intersection of theology and pastoral ministry, I have advocated a contextual understanding of theology, one that is informed by and seeks to inform the actual questions and struggles of Christian life and ministry in particular times and places. I have attempted to sketch some of the prominent elements of the context of theology and ministry today. In sum, a

³ See Francis Fukuyama, *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity* (New York: Free Press, 1995).

theology that matters today in congregational life is one that knows how to distinguish and relate law and gospel in a time of moral confusion; that affirms God's hard love of the flesh in all its misery and bondage in a time when new spiritualities are huckstered like consumer products; that is concerned for the distinctive identity of Christian community in the midst of a pluralistic society but that does not yield to the temptation to turn inward; and that knows how and why to value unity and diversity in Christ in a time marked by deep clashes and conflicts between people and groups defined by their gender, race, ethnicity, and class.

Does theology matter today to pastors and members of congregations? The answer to that question depends on what kind of theology it is. It depends on whether a theology serves, as it should, the proclamation and embodiment of the gospel of Jesus Christ in our particular time and place.

Henry Sloane Coffin and Charles R. Erdman and Our Search for a Livable Piety

by BARBARA G. WHEELER

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ALMOST EVERYONE AGREES that mainline Protestantism is in trouble, down and, some say, almost out. One party of interpreters has argued, I think convincingly, that the institutional decline of mainline Protestantism is the result of trends and developments it does not control.¹ Another group of interpreters passionately maintains that mainline Protestantism is the author of its loss of membership, money, and social influence.² I am pretty sure that they are wrong about that, but they are right about something else. We mainline Protestants are lacking a sense of identity, direction, and purpose. This is most evident in the erosion of our patterns of life, our piety, a term that I used in its classical sense to encompass not only religious practices but also the whole way of life of faithful people.

This deficit, the loss of a sense of how we should live in and lead communities of our kind of faith, is far more serious than our other, more visible losses. Religious groups can weather oscillations in their size and institutional power, but they cannot survive without what Brian Gerrish calls

¹ The most compelling statement of this view is that of Wade Clark Roof and William McKinney, *American Mainline Religion: Its Changing Shape and Future* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1987). In a previous lecture in this series, I labeled Roof and McKinney's analysis, which traces mainline "decline" to powerful forces in North American society (such as localism, individualism, and the weakening of ascriptive religious ties), the "cool" theory.

² The number of such interpreters is legion, and they are a diverse lot, accusing mainline Protestants of many different lapses and offenses and proposing a wide range of remedies, including greater theological rigor, more forthright social activism, separation of the church from the world, and more intense religious fervor. See, for instance, James H. Moorhead, "Redefining Confessionalism: Presbyterians in the Twentieth Century," in *The Confessional Mosaic: Presbyterians and Twentieth-Century Theology*, ed. Coalter, Mulder, and Weeks (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1990), 59-83; Dean M. Kelley, *Why the Conservative Churches are Growing: A Study in Sociology of Religion* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1972); Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989); Stanley Hauerwas, *After Christendom? How the Church is to Behave if Freedom, Justice and a Christian Nation are Bad Ideas* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1991); Thomas C. Reeves, *The Empty Church: The Suicide of Liberal Christianity* (New York: Free Press, 1996). In previous lectures in this series, I called the theories of these and other writers who think that mainline denominations' decline is their own fault the "hot critics," in contrast to Roof and McKinney's cooler view.

a “way”—ideas, metaphors, attitudes, language, values, habits, and aesthetics, woven into practices that express a particular species of faith. If a religious tradition cannot maintain such a “way,” it does not really exist, even if some religious organization continues to bear its name. Our way, our piety, is so faded and frayed that the patterns that comprise it are often not distinguishable. The condition is serious: Without the ingredients of a way of life, there can be no community in the church and no presence of the religious community in the world.

So what shall we do? Where shall we look for piety? If it is true that God gives us the means to live with and for God, and to do God’s work in the world, then piety—patterns of faithful living that are formed by and suffused with the Word and Spirit of God—should be near enough that we can hear it and do it. This does not mean, however, that a ready-made, fully formed way of Christian life for our time is there for the taking. Unfortunately, we mainline Protestants are not going to be able to get our piety off the shelf. We are going to have to put one together ourselves. But there are resources, places we can find pictures, blueprints, and parts for the project of creating a livable and lively piety.

One source is the past, the history of our stream of Christian tradition. In this essay, I look back at some well-lived lives in times before our own. I do this not because I think we can go back; I do not believe that we can retrieve a piety from a period now behind us. But I want to take a detour into history because I think it is easier to see in retrospect what a way of life looks like. Even though we will not want to adopt the particular piety we find in an earlier era, we can gain from history a picture of piety that refreshes our sense of what it is and what it accomplishes. If we can recognize one kind of piety from the past, we may know when we have glimpsed a very different kind for the future.

Let me introduce you to two pious people, two persons who in many ways seem very different and remote from us.³ Both were born in the last century

³ I have relied on the following sources for constructing this account. For information about Henry Sloane Coffin, the biography by Morgan Phelps Noyes, *Henry Sloane Coffin: The Man and His Ministry* (New York: Scribner’s, 1964). For information about Charles Erdman, John A. Garraty, ed., *Dictionary of American Biography*, Supplement Six (1956–1960) (New York: Scribner’s, 1980), 195–6; Charles T. Fritsch, Bruce M. Metzger, and Elmer G. Homrighausen, “In Memoriam: Charles R. Erdman,” *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 54:2 (November, 1960): 36–9. For accounts of events leading to and resulting from the General Assembly of 1925: Bradley J. Longfield, *The Presbyterian Controversy: Fundamentalists, Modernists and Moderates* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Robert Hastings Nichols, *Presbyterianism in New York State: A History of the Synod and Its Predecessors* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963), and Lefferts A. Loetscher, *The Broadening Church: A Study of Theological Issues in the Presbyterian Church Since 1869* (Philadelphia: University of

and died in the middle of this one. Both were white Protestant ministers in a period when white people, males and Protestants, dominated every facet of this society. (I will have more to say later about the differences between their world and ours.) But in other ways, these two are connected to us—and I mean that specifically, to *us*, to you and to me.

One of these ministers, Henry Sloane Coffin, led Auburn Seminary's partner institution, Union Seminary in New York, for twenty years. During that time, he invited Auburn to move to Union's campus in New York City. The more I learn about Coffin, the more evident it is to me that his spirit is still deeply knit into the fabric of both schools. The other, Charles Rosenbury Erdman, was professor of practical theology and an animating presence at Princeton Theological Seminary for fifty years. Many of you are staying this week in the building named for him, built on the site of the house he occupied and opened to generations of Princeton students. Coffin and Erdman had very different backgrounds, and they belonged to opposing parties in the Presbyterian Church; yet, at a critical moment they joined forces to save their denomination from schism, and during the episode, they became each other's intense admirers. For all the differences between them that I am about to describe, Coffin and Erdman shared a piety, a pattern of reverence that infused every dimension of their lives. In a day when the Presbyterian Church, my denomination, is again divided, and some of us are caught yet again in bitter conflict with our brothers and sisters in the faith, I find their story instructive and their lives examples that make us think about how we should be leading our own.

There is an additional reason why it is appropriate to focus on these two figures on this occasion. Princeton, on the one hand, and Union and Auburn, on the other, are often stereotyped as housing the theological extremes of mainline Protestantism; the view of Princeton as a conservative center and the Union/Auburn duo as ultraliberal or even radical is common enough that some people thought it odd that I would be asked to lecture here. In fact, Auburn and Union are moderate, not radical, institutions, with various viewpoints represented in each; and Princeton through its whole history has had strong centrist as well as conservative parties in its faculty and board, with some notable liberal voices included. Further, there have been remarkable instances of mutual aid between Princeton and the other two schools. For instance, in 1870, Union went to bat for Princeton, seeking relief for it from

Pennsylvania Press, 1954). For thoughtful analysis of the issues involved, see Jack B. Rogers and Donald K. McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979), 364–5.

the arrangement whereby the General Assembly made all faculty appointments to Princeton. If Princeton could be given the right to choose its own faculty, subject only to assembly veto, Union proposed, Union itself, which had been founded by Presbyterians but remained independent, would subject its faculty appointments to the same veto.⁴ It was a brave step on Union's part, one it regretted twenty years later when its appointment of Charles Augustus Briggs was vetoed, and Briggs was tried for and convicted of heresy. At the time, however, it was an act of theological collegiality, and it was not the only instance of the three schools acting in each other's behalf.

But it is also true that at the most difficult junctures of Presbyterian history, the faculties and graduates of Union and Auburn on one side and Princeton on the other have been set against each other. Auburn and Union were both founded in an atmosphere of hot theological controversy to offset Princeton's Old School influence in the church, and a century later, amid an equally violent struggle, Erdman and Coffin faced the challenge of resolving issues not only between themselves but also among large numbers of followers allied with the schools in which they had influence. Their success demonstrated, as I hope the hospitality of our seminaries to each other does today, just how beneficial such theological friendships can be, not only for our institutions, but also for the wider church. I think it is fitting for the president of Auburn to tell the Coffin and Erdman story on this campus at this, yet another, difficult time in the life of the Presbyterian Church.

I. CHARLES R. ERDMAN

Charles R. Erdman was born in 1866. In the middle of the battle that he and Coffin resolved, he declared, "I have always been a conservative of the conservatives,"⁵ but his heritage was a complex one. His father was a New School Presbyterian. When the New and Old Schools reunited, some of the New Schoolers went on to become social gospel liberals, but others, such as William Erdman, continued to emphasize the revivalistic rather than social-reform side of the New School platform. He became an assistant to and disciple of the great evangelist Dwight L. Moody, and in those circles, came into contact with premillennialists looking for the Lord's imminent return and their close allies, the dispensationalists, who were certain that scripture, carefully and literally read, yields many clues to the God's strategic millennial plan.

⁴ Henry Sloane Coffin, *A Half Century of Union Theological Seminary, 1896-1945: An Informal History* (New York: Scribner's, 1954), 16-8.

⁵ Longfield, *The Presbyterian Controversy*, 140.

Charles Erdman's father was, in other words, a fundamentalist, and his son followed in his footsteps. Both were editors of Scofield's dispensational reference Bible and of *The Fundamentals* series of pamphlets. But both were fundamentalists of a certain kind, the Moody kind. "With negotiations he had little to do," wrote Charles Erdman of Dwight Moody. Conservative as he was, Moody deplored doctrinal controversy and worked with both liberals and conservatives "to win followers for Christ . . . and encourage" the study of the Bible.⁶

Charles Erdman attended the College at Princeton and then Princeton Seminary. After fifteen years in Pennsylvania parishes, he was called in 1906 to a controversial new position at Princeton, professor of practical theology. There, in the face of suspicion and sometimes outright opposition from the majority of the faculty, who held to the Old School view that theological education was instruction in Bible, doctrine, and preaching only—everything else was dangerous froufrou—Erdman taught practical subjects, organized one of the early field education programs, and despite his removal for reasons of faculty politics from the post of student adviser, gained enormous popularity with students. At his death, faculty colleagues wrote that "his influence upon graduates of Princeton Seminary was incalculable."⁷

Unfortunately, there is no full-length biography of Erdman, so we do not have many of the kind of stories about him that are available in profusion about Coffin. But here is one that gives some sense of what sort of teacher he was. He threw holiday parties for large groups of students. At these gatherings, he would distribute to students paper money that he had minted and then auction books from his collection to the highest paper-money bidders.

Erdman had many other remarkable qualities. He was warm and genial and by his own account, he "had a passion for friendships." He gave away not only books but often funds to those who needed them, and he made it a matter of principle, in his words, to "render any service which I was requested and always filled any possible engagement where I felt I could be of help." Because of this policy, never to say no, he preached more than 10,000 sermons in his lifetime. He had a superb sense of humor and was Princeton's favorite toastmaster and songleader during his time on the faculty.⁸

Most of all, Erdman cared about biblically based Christian faith. He believed in the Bible's literal infallibility, but it mattered much more to him

⁶ Ibid., 136.

⁷ Fritsch, Metzger, and Homrighausen, "In Memoriam—Charles R. Erdman," 36.

⁸ Ibid., 36–9.

that biblical truth changed lives than that the system of biblical doctrines to which he subscribed—the Westminster Confession and the five doctrines known as the fundamentals—were universally honored. With the Spirit's help, he believed, fundamental biblical truth could bring about personal and social transformation, making people “more fruitful in service, more holy in character, more patient in suffering.”⁹ Such qualities, wrote Erdman, were important in every walk of Christian life, but especially so in theological discussions. “In debating Christian doctrines,” he wrote, “one needs a vein of humor, common sense and brotherly love.”¹⁰

One would not think that this is a controversial position—be nice to your theological opponents—but in turn-of-the-century Princeton, it was. J. Gresham Machen, Erdman's most brilliant faculty colleague, became his bitter foe over precisely this issue. Erdman pointed out that the two did not differ on a single point of fundamentalist doctrine, only over “spirit, methods, or policies.” Machen, who wrote that “Christian doctrine . . . is not merely connected with the gospel, but it is identical with the gospel,” vehemently disagreed. He called the difference radical, a matter of principle, because of Erdman's openness to Christian fellowship with those who did not share his strict beliefs. That was indeed Erdman's position. “To us any man good enough to go to heaven,” he once said, “is good enough to be a member of our church, regardless of interpretation of the points of doctrine.”¹¹

II. HENRY SLOANE COFFIN

Henry Sloane Coffin came from very different circumstances than Erdman and was formed in a different set of institutions. He was an aristocrat. His Coffin ancestors were early New England settlers; the Sloanes came from Scotland in the middle of the nineteenth century and quickly became wealthy in the furniture business. Henry attended private schools, vacationed at the seashore, and traveled annually to Europe as a child.

Henry's father was a prominent New York lawyer, a pew-holder at Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church and later a trustee of Brick Church in New York, but never a Presbyterian Church member. Edmund Coffin found he could not reconcile the claims of religion and science, and his deep personal integrity would not permit him to make a public profession of faith. But Henry's Scottish grandmother Sloane and deeply religious mother had a

⁹ Longfield, *The Presbyterian Controversy*, 140.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 146.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 141–2.

profound influence on him. They taught him the substance of Reformed faith and implanted the intellectually venturesome attitudes of the nineteenth-century Scottish Church. At the same time, Coffin was also shaped by his experience as a teenaged observer at the heresy trial of Charles Augustus Briggs, which he attended because his father was attorney for Union Seminary.

Coffin grew up a mixture of these strands and influences. He had, he wrote, "a genuine relish for things associated with religion."¹² He was thoroughly Presbyterian, but much closer in his views to the progressive wing of the Church of Scotland than to the Old School preaching of John Hall he heard at Fifth Avenue Church. From a very young age, he knew he was headed for ministry. His mother was delighted, his father distressed. He remained close to and a great admirer of both his parents, living with them or on the same city block as they for the rest of their lives.

Coffin was a brilliant student. He entered Yale College and graduated close to the head of his class before he was twenty. He went to seminary at New College, Edinburgh, then soaked up some even more advanced theology in Germany before finishing his studies at Union in New York. He chose to begin his ministry at a tiny mission in a hall over a fish market in the Bronx, with an oyster counter for a pulpit. By tireless knocking on apartment doors and even some street preaching, he attracted a congregation, which grew to almost four hundred in four years, with a Sunday School of equal size. He built a building with contributions from the congregation supplemented by gifts from his rich relatives and even richer Yale classmates. He was intensely proud of the fact that in his new church development at Bedford Park, rich and poor worshipped together, and some children of color joined the Sunday School.

Inclusiveness and equality in church life were major themes of Coffin's ministry. He believed that the stratification of the church along economic and class lines was unchristian, and he brought this view to Madison Avenue Church, the wealthy but troubled congregation that was his next call. He moved slowly. He later wrote, "We took the call as we found it, asking for no radical changes. We had first to become established in their confidence." But he and the able nonordained church workers he recruited—women as well as men—slowly unraveled the congregation's rigid class divisions. Before Coffin, it was the practice to send immigrant families who came to the church building on Madison Avenue to the Good Will Mission the congregation ran east of Third Avenue. Coffin himself spent much of his time in this eastern

¹² Noyes, *Henry Sloane Coffin*, 67.

territory, calling on residents in their homes and inviting them not to the mission but to Madison Avenue Church itself. Later, he persuaded the church to abolish pew rents, a system that made life easy for the minister, because by placing a high price on the most desirable seats, the budget of the church was automatically met. It was a great arrangement: no stewardship sermon, no every-member canvass, no budget deficit. But Coffin, says a biographer, "abhorred the necessity of facing a congregation on Sunday mornings visibly graded as to wealth or poverty by location in the church." The pew-rent system was an indication, Coffin wrote, "of the saturation of even Christian minds with the American commercial spirit, where prosperity was hailed as a sure token of God's favor."¹³

When change in this system finally came, a number of Madison Avenue's wealthy members accused Coffin of ruining the congregation. Coffin seems to have had the gift of meeting criticism with patience and humor. For example, two longtime members were inalterably opposed to another of his innovations, the practice that he had imported from Scotland of giving a sermon to children at the front of the church as part of the regular service. Eventually he gave the two disgruntled members a recommendation to another congregation where the more common practice of the day, excluding children to maintain complete decorum, was still in force. Of this incident Coffin said, "The problems of combining two ladies with such outlook and several hundred small children with little or no religious background seemed insoluble, and as these good women could 'read their titles clear' to their future mansions, it did not seem the church's duty to please their taste and neglect the children."¹⁴ Coffin became adept at taking risky positions in which he ardently believed. In the face of the First World War, which he supported and during which he spent months preaching to the troops in Europe, he also preached in New York against the widespread militaristic mood, a mood that was not, he insisted, consistent with the mind of Christ.

Like Erdman, Coffin was by all reports a man of great charm and attractiveness, with "deep eyes," wrote a reporter for *Time* magazine, "and strange eyebrows." His Scottish mentor at New College, no fan of American Presbyterians, wrote that Coffin "was born under a good star [to] show what was possible in the line of American men." Henry Sloane Coffin was magnetic and witty, a natural leader with, eventually, thousands of friends and followers. Like Erdman, he was adored by students. Almost everyone else, even close associates, referred to him as Dr. Coffin, but generations of Union

¹³ Ibid., 98.

¹⁴ Ibid., 103.

students called him Uncle Henry. He knew this and was surprised and pleased. Also like Erdman, Coffin was an inclusivist. He believed that fundamentalism did great harm in the church and the world, but he was willing to share his denomination with fundamentalists. "We must," he wrote, "learn to tolerate those who do not wish to tolerate us."¹⁵

The differences between the two should not be minimized. They lived in different social, intellectual, and church circles. Coffin preached on hundreds of seminary and college campuses in his lifetime. There is no evidence in the accounts of his life that he spoke at Princeton Seminary, which was the epicenter of Charles Erdman's world. Coffin was intensely evangelical. One of his best speeches, on liberal evangelicalism, puts it passionately: "We are evangelicals." But he was also a liberal, because, he wrote, the good news must be true news, "hospitable to every movement of human thought." Making the gospel "appealing and convincing to the thoughtful folk of our time"—perhaps Coffin had his own agnostic father in mind—was his chief aim.¹⁶ For Coffin, the appealing, convincing, and true gospel did not include the orthodox affirmations that mattered to Erdman, those five fundamental doctrines declared "essential and necessary" by a series of General Assemblies.

III. THE FUNDAMENTALIST CONTROVERSY

It was in the battle in the Presbyterian Church over whether subscription to these fundamentals was required for all ordained ministers that Erdman and Coffin met. I will not give you the long history of the conflict, about which I have written elsewhere.¹⁷ Suffice it here to say that, in 1925, the Presbyterian Church was on the brink of a split. New York City Presbytery had licensed two Union students, one of whom was Coffin's seminary assistant Henry Pitney Van Dusen, who could not affirm the virgin birth, one of the five fundamentals. The presbytery had been challenged on its licensing decision, and the General Assembly was set to rule on the challenge.

The assembly opened as Presbyterian national assemblies always do, with the election of a moderator to preside at the meeting. Erdman had decided to run for this post, despite his painful defeat the previous year by a more

¹⁵ Longfield, *The Presbyterian Controversy*, 98.

¹⁶ Noyes, *Henry Sloane Coffin*, 126–7.

¹⁷ See Barbara G. Wheeler, "The Auburn Affirmation: Reflections for a Seventy-Fifth Anniversary," available on the Internet at www.auburnsem.org or from Auburn Theological Seminary, 3041 Broadway, New York, NY, 10027.

conservative member of his own fundamentalist party. Erdman wanted more than anything to keep the church from breaking into two parts, and he thought as moderator that he could help to prevent it. This time he was elected, after a nominating speech in which he was described as "the best loved man in the church today."¹⁸ Coffin was also present in the assembly as the leader of the New York Presbytery delegation, all of whose members knew that if the assembly would not let the licensing of Van Dusen stand, they too would soon be deemed unfit for service as ministers and elders.

The assembly did rule against the presbytery. The upholders of the fundamentals, especially Erdman's purist Princeton colleague Machen and his allies, were jubilant. The New York City and New York State commissioners, including many Union and Auburn graduates, prepared for their inevitable departure. Most of this group wanted to leave rather than be forced out. But Coffin, at Erdman's pleading, persuaded them to postpone the walkout. In return, Erdman invited Coffin to voice his protest to the assembly. After Coffin finished, Erdman surrendered the chair and moved the creation of a commission to study the causes of unrest. The motion was approved. The commission was appointed, with fundamentalists of moderate temper in the majority, and the assembly ended peacefully, without a walkout or a split. Erdman and Coffin each warmly acknowledged the role of the other and their new friendship in this outcome. Erdman displayed "admirable tact, tenderness, good judgment and manifest fairness," Coffin told his congregation after the assembly.¹⁹ "At least one very great compensation for passing through the experience of this present year," Erdman had written earlier to Coffin, "is that I have come to know you so much better and my affection for you has deepened."²⁰

The next year, the commission made a preliminary report. It ruled on the side of New York City Presbytery. Though most of the commissioners personally affirmed the fundamentals, they recognized that because the fundamentals stood outside the Presbyterian Constitution and Confessions, the fundamentals could not be imposed on ministers. The next year the assembly passed the final report, the fruit of the strenuous joint efforts of the fundamentalist Erdman and the liberal Coffin, with only a single dissenting vote.²¹

¹⁸ Longfield, *The Presbyterian Controversy*, 150.

¹⁹ Noyes, *Henry Sloane Coffin*, 176.

²⁰ Longfield, *The Presbyterian Controversy*, 150.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 147-61.

IV. A SHARED PIETY

Charles Erdman and Henry Sloane Coffin were not perfect. Most of the kind of stories I have told, the ones collected by colleagues and sympathetic biographers, put the subject in a positive light. We also know, however, that Erdman participated in the retaliation against Machen that eventually drove him out of Princeton Seminary and the Presbyterian Church. Coffin shone when he was the apostle of change and modernity; later in his life, though, he had a great deal of difficulty sympathizing with and sometimes handling Union students who were more radical than he was.

But the lives of both men had a certain shape. What provided that shape is what I have been calling piety, an integrated pattern of life grounded in Christian faith but not restricted to religious expressions. As I said earlier, Erdman and Coffin shared a piety, and I think that fact explains how they could so readily join forces to hold the church together. As I think I have made clear, the bond between them was not similar life experiences, or friends in common, or shared theological ideas. The bond was not Presbyterian patriotism either. Though both loved the Presbyterian Church as the home in which they had met Jesus Christ, neither made denominational loyalty a basic value.²² Coffin crusaded for Protestant unity, and Erdman, like Moody, cared much more about Christianity than any of its branches. They joined and worked together not because they agreed or hung out with the same people or put Presbyterianism first in their priorities, but because they wanted to lead the same kind of Christian lives.

Coffin's and Erdman's lives as Christians in the world give us a picture of an integrated piety in our tradition in an earlier time. Make no mistake, things were *very* different then. Biblical literacy was widespread. Church attendance was the middle class norm. People prayed in public without embarrassment or challenge. Protestants such as Erdman and Coffin were at the social and political center. Erdman knew four presidents. Coffin vacationed with secretaries of state and war. And old Protestant virtues—diligence, thrift, modesty, generosity—were dominant social values as well. The piety that worked then will not be effective in our very different time, but still we can glimpse in Erdman's and Coffin's lives an outline of piety. We will have to fill it in for ourselves, but having identified one species of piety might help us to recognize, or even create, another.

²² I have fundamental disagreements with the interpretation of the Presbyterian events in the 1920s set forth recently in William J. Weston, *Presbyterian Pluralism: Competition in a Protestant House* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1997). Weston argues that the overriding motive of leaders who prevented a schism was denominational loyalty.

What are the headings of this outline, the general elements of the picture? I have spotted four main themes. What first impresses me about both Coffin and Erdman is their theological energy. Neither was a scholar in the technical sense. Both were knowledgeable. Erdman was said to know the content of the Bible better than almost anyone else of his time; Coffin was something of an expert in the theological and institutional history of Reformed churches. Neither, however, would appear on anyone's list of original twentieth-century theological thinkers. Yet both were extraordinarily effective practical theologians, hammering out positions to which they gave powerful expression—theological positions that attracted people and held them and that contributed to changed lives, to a durable church, and arguably to the life of the world just as much as did the intellectually brilliant formulations of professional theologians—whether Machen and van Til on the right or Tillich and Niebuhr on the left.

Another element of the piety of both men was a vibrant Christian character. On the one hand, they were joyful and upbeat. Erdman may have been a premillennialist, but he was not the pessimistic kind who thought it was all downhill until the fire and sword. Coffin was Presbyterian to his toes in the Scots mold, but there was nothing dour about him. Both were warm, magnanimous, cheerful, and happily in love with the gospel and the work of preaching it. Both also took risks for what they believed and endured the slings and arrows that resulted. (Anyone who thinks that piety is a recipe for uniformity should note that both these men broke and remade the molds that shaped them in their early years.) For both, standing for convictions was a painful process. Unlike many of their fellow controversialists who enjoyed fighting, Erdman and Coffin preferred peace. Erdman is described in every biographical account I could find as irenic, like his father and like their idol, Dwight L. Moody. Coffin was a little feistier, but he too would have preferred to stay out of the fray. "I . . . hate the rows," he wrote, "for I happen to have had a number of tragic cases of religious need and the rows seem so trivial and irrelevant in the face of the Christ and what he can do when trusted."²³

A third element of the piety of these two was public responsibility. They cared about different causes. Erdman was a conservative evangelical whose social passions were moral issues such as Sabbath observance and temperance. Coffin was a liberal evangelical whose causes—social equality, fair treatment of workers, judicious use of military force—reflected his view that converted Christians could make existing social structures function God's way. Neither view has much contemporary force, but both men made a public impact in

²³ Noyes, *Henry Sloane Coffin*, 179.

their time. Erdman was active in the life of Princeton borough, talked with some regularity with the nation's leaders, and sent his son into politics; Coffin was well enough known nationally that he was pictured on the cover of *Time* the week after he was inaugurated as president of Union. Granted, it was much easier then for Protestant clergy to make a public mark, but that does not discredit the faithfulness of both men to public issues. "We are to lead the Church in a day when it can not have less than a world outlook nor a smaller purpose than the regeneration of the entire social order."²⁴ Coffin said that, and Erdman, with different goals and methods in view, would have agreed.

Finally, both Coffin and Erdman were deeply religious, but both were adamant that religious feelings, like theological ideas, mattered less for their own sake than for active, practical life in Christ. Just as important as the nurture of the church's spiritual life, Erdman said, was "the proper expression of this life through the activities of its members." Cut-flower spirituality, fervor without witness, interested neither of these ministers. Coffin invested enormous energy in transforming the pietistic apparatus of turn-of-the-century Protestantism. He imported prayers and liturgies from Scotland that he thought had more fibre than the soft and sweet ones in use in America, and he took a special interest in hymns. Early in his ministry, he published a hymnal that contained some of his improved versions of the standards. We will sing one of those Coffinized hymns this evening: the German pietist hymn, "God himself is with us/Let us all adore him." To the language of inward adoration ("God is here within us/Soul in silence fear him"), Coffin added this beautiful verse:

Thou pervadest all things; let thy radiant beauty
 Light mine eyes to see my duty.
 As the tender flowers eagerly unfold them,
 To the sunlight calmly hold them,
 So let me quietly in thy rays imbue me;
 Let thy light shine through me.²⁵

Theology. Character. Public responsibility. Religious fervor and spiritual depth. These themes are familiar. As it happens, they are the ones that are regularly identified with the critics of mainline Protestantism who blame it for its own problems. I still do not think that those critics are right in the substance of their criticisms or their one-shot proposals for reform. I continue

²⁴ Longfield, *The Presbyterian Controversy*, 99.

²⁵ *The Hymnal of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America* (New York: The Church Pension Fund, 1940), No. 477, v. 2.

to believe that mainline Protestantism's decline in numbers and influence is mostly the result of external developments. But those who think differently may nevertheless have pointed us in the right direction; first, by insisting that we admit that something is missing, which I have identified as piety, and second, by each naming a territory of the empty space in which our need for piety is especially great. These territories are the same ones we saw emphasized in the lives of the two ministers I have just introduced. In further reflections, I believe that we can use these categories—*theology, character, public presence, and revival*—as an outline or map of the piety terrain, as we continue together the search for what substance, what specific ideas, values, practices and commitments, are needed to fill the piety vacuum today.

Social Witness in Generous Orthodoxy: The New Presbyterian “Study Catechism”

by GEORGE HUNSINGER

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THE TWENTIETH CENTURY has witnessed a number of initiatives to encourage political responsibility in the church. Each achieved a measure of success before hitting on diminishing returns. The religious socialism of the '10s and '20s in Switzerland and Germany, the American social gospel of about the same era, the worker-priest movement in postwar France, the Latin American liberation theologies of the '60s and '70s with their base communities, the black theologies of the same decades in the U.S. and Africa, and the slightly later feminist and womanist theologies in industrialized nations—these and other efforts were progressive campaigns that made a mark but did not prevail. The recurring pattern of early promise broken by arrest and eventual decline surely had causes that were various and complex. Yet these campaigns all had at least one thing in common. Each in its own way forced the church to choose between progressive politics and traditional faith. Each made it seem as though the two were mutually exclusive. Each therefore forged an unwitting alliance with its opposition, which shared the same diagnosis, only from the opposite point of view. Each failed to see that, confronted with a forced option, the church will inevitably choose not to abandon traditional faith. Equally tragically, each failed to see that the forced option between progressive politics and traditional faith is false.¹

The falsity of the option might have been plain from the existence of any number of prominent figures. Dorothy Day, William Stringfellow, Fanny Lou Hamer, Oscar Romero, André Trocmé, Marietta Jaeger, Helmut Gollwitzer, Lech Walesa, Kim Dae-jung, Ita Ford, Desmond Tutu, and not least Karl Barth are among the many twentieth-century Christians known for their progressive politics. They saw no reason to choose between their love for Jesus Christ as confessed by faith and their love for the poor and the oppressed. They had learned from initiatives for political responsibility while

¹ I do not mean to suggest that combining progressive politics with traditional faith will guarantee success, only that forcing the church to choose between them virtually guarantees failure.

refusing the fatal choice. Traditional faith was for them not a hindrance but an incentive for progressive political change. It sustained them in struggle through their darkest hours. It was not for them something disreputable to be hidden from those in need, nor was it something to be rejected because dishonored by injustice and failure in the church. It was rather the hard-won and priceless deposit of truth that withstood every effort to discredit its relevance.

In 1998, the 210th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) adopted two new catechisms. In a church wracked by divisions over various social issues, the catechisms passed the assembly by an impressive 80/20% margin, with the drafting committee receiving a standing ovation after the vote.² Answering a questionnaire when the assembly was over, a strong majority of the delegates (60%) said they regarded the new catechisms as the most important item they had acted upon. The catechisms have since been published in a number of forms. Assisted by study-guide materials, they are slowly seeping into the life of the church, being used for confirmation classes, leadership training programs, and congregational education. They are not proposed as tests of orthodoxy, but simply as much-needed teaching tools for those who wish to use them. They can be employed flexibly and creatively in a variety of different settings. The real test will be the extent to which the catechisms are actually taken up and used.

The longer of the two documents, called *The Study Catechism*, on which this essay will concentrate, is distinctive in that it seeks to combine—in however rudimentary a form—traditional faith with progressive politics. This combination of both traditional and progressive motifs would seem to make *The Study Catechism* relatively unique in the history of Reformed catechisms and confessions, not to mention other Reformation or ecumenical symbols. The new catechism endeavors to balance concern for the church with concern for the world. Taken as a whole, it aims to be both traditional and contemporary, both evangelical and liberal, both Reformed and ecumenical. It casts a broad yet careful net in an attempt to be as inclusive with integrity as possible.

“Generous orthodoxy” might be used to sum up the balance that both catechisms seek to strike. A remark from the one theologian whose work in particular, more often than not, brought the drafting committee into unity,

² The catechisms were approved for use over a five-year period. A Consultation to evaluate the church’s experience with them has been established through the PC(USA)’s Office of Theology and Worship. The catechisms will eventually be resubmitted to the General Assembly in revised form for final approval. The currently approved documents were written by a Special Committee of the General Assembly that worked over a four-year period.

illustrates the term. We ought not to exclude anyone from our hearts and prayers, this theologian advised, but rather to embrace "all people who dwell on earth. For what God has determined concerning them is beyond our knowing except that it is no less godly than humane to wish and hope the best for them." Although these are not always the sentiments associated with John Calvin, they appear in his work more often than commonly supposed.³ Certainly they represent the Reformed tradition at its best. When asked about the term "generous orthodoxy," which he coined, the late Hans Frei of Yale, once commented: "Generosity without orthodoxy is nothing, but orthodoxy without generosity is worse than nothing." The new catechisms offer the broad center of the PC(USA) the vision of a generous orthodoxy that can embrace its diversity, help to heal its wounds, and equip it for faithful service to Christ in the century that lies ahead.

Before turning to the theme of social witness, a sketch of the new catechisms will be provided, followed by some brief reflections on how catechisms have functioned in the Reformed tradition.

I. THE NEW CATECHISMS: AN OVERVIEW

The shorter of the two adopted by the 1998 General Assembly, called *The First Catechism*, aims to reach children who are nine or ten years old. With sixty short questions and answers, it surveys the biblical narrative in outline. After a short prologue, designed to draw the children in, it traces the following sequence: creation and fall, Israel as God's covenant people, Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and the church in the power of the Holy Spirit, concluding with an explanation of the Lord's Prayer. For the sake of simplicity in the flow of questions, the Ten Commandments, though listed, are not expounded. Elementary teachings about scripture, the sacraments, worship, and mission appear in the section on the church. For each question and answer, specific Bible verses are attached. This method is designed to help pupils gain a basic grasp of the biblical material on which the answers are based. (A similar correlation of scripture with the questions and answers of *The Study Catechism* has also been prepared.) It seemed advisable not to call this document a "children's catechism," since it may also be useful for some adults.

While *The First Catechism* has a narrative structure, *The Study Catechism* unpacks the basics of the Christian faith by examining the Apostles' Creed,

³ See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 3:20, 38.

the Ten Commandments, and the Lord's Prayer. Lengthier and more detailed than the narrative catechism, it is suitable for use with ages fourteen and up. Traditional topics like the creation of the world "out of nothing" or like Jesus Christ's Incarnation, saving death, and Resurrection receive significant attention. At the same time, more contemporary concerns like faith and science, the problem of evil, and Christianity's relation to other religions are also touched upon. Openly affirming key Reformation themes, such as justification by faith alone and the scripture principle, the catechism is "evangelical." Yet in an equally open way, social concerns, biblical criticism, modern scientific findings, and hope for the whole creation find glad affirmation as well, ensuring that the catechism is also "liberal." Finally, distinctive Reformed convictions (for example, on providence, covenant, and adoption as God's children) are balanced by a deliberate ecumenism (for example, on the Trinity, the sacraments, and "anti-supersessionism").⁴

The use of catechisms was revitalized by the Reformation. In normal Protestantism, a minister could enter the pulpit and presuppose a fully catechized congregation—a situation that prevailed for at least three hundred years. Today this level of Christian education is almost beyond imagination, at least for the PC(USA). In the continental Reformed tradition, it was common to preach throughout the year on the Heidelberg Catechism. Two services would be held each Sunday, with the evening service focussing on a question and answer from the catechism. The evening service presupposed that most people in the congregation had been through confirmation where the catechism was thoroughly studied. Sometimes, notwithstanding the Heidelberg's length, confirmands had memorized the whole thing. In the Reformed tradition's Anglo-American branch from which Presbyterian churches come, the Westminster standards were used in a similar way. Young people studied them for confirmation and instruction, sometimes memorizing The Shorter Catechism, though a preaching service directly on the Westminster standards was not as common.

Luther is the figure whose vision was formative. He and his followers had no idea what was going to happen in the dangerous period after the German Reformation took wing. Never far from his mind from one year to the next was whether he would be alive or murdered. Eventually, various theologians set out from Wittenberg to visit the local congregations. What they found was not encouraging. Luther once came across a priest who could not recite the

⁴ Like the Heidelberg Catechism (but unlike the Westminster standards), it might be mentioned, The Study Catechism gives little prominence to "predestination," thus taking a moderately Calvinistic position.

Lord's Prayer. (We think things have declined for us in the PC(USA), and they have, but there is a point we have not reached yet!) Luther revitalized the church through the catechisms. His Small Catechism, which is very simple, has lasted right down to the present day. He saw catechisms as a way of reversing the church's decline, and it worked for hundreds of years.

Luther thought that the catechism should be taught at home. He did not see the Christian household as a part of the church. He saw it as a form of the church. It was a school for faith. Parents used the catechism to teach their children around the dinner table. Note that the word *catechesis* means oral instruction, not memorization. Luther and the Reformation believed that all Christians needed a basic understanding of the Apostles' Creed, the Ten Commandments, and the Lord's Prayer. As much as anything, it was the catechisms that were responsible for the success of Protestantism. They made it possible to transmit a lively, well-informed faith from one generation to the next. When the catechisms were used as the Reformation intended, memorization was secondary to understanding.⁵ Robert Wuthnow, the Princeton sociologist of religion, has said that the biggest reason why "mainline" Protestant churches in the United States are no longer retaining their young people is that they have failed to teach them a clear, compelling set of religious beliefs. The new catechisms could contribute to reversing this contemporary decline.

"Today in all dimensions of life," Jürgen Moltmann has written, "faith is urged to prove its relevance for the changing and bettering of the world. Under the pressure to make itself useful everywhere, Christian faith no longer knows why it is faith or why it is Christian."⁶ Social relevance, as Moltmann suggests, will continue to elude a church that fails to fulfill its primary vocation as a community of faith. Christian faith that no longer knows why it is faith or why it is Christian has little to offer anyone. The halfhearted, low-commitment religion of much middle-class American church life corresponds to the safe, domesticated deity so devastatingly described by H. Richard Niebuhr: "A God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross."⁷ Wrath, sin, judgment, and the cross are difficult themes that require responsible retrieval in the church today, without which there will be no

⁵ As T. F. Torrance has pointed out, in previous generations people who were brought up on The Shorter Westminster Catechism, even when not otherwise highly educated, acquired an intellectual and spiritual proficiency not easily matched by churchgoers today. See T. F. Torrance, *The School of Faith* (New York: Harper, 1959), xxix.

⁶ Jürgen Moltmann, *Umkehr zur Zukunft* (Gütersloh: G. Mohn, 1970), 133.

⁷ H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America* (New York: Harper, 1937), 193.

liberation from mediocre Christian niceness. Shallow and pernicious notions of “self-esteem,” pervading every sector of the church, whether “evangelical” or “liberal,” in our increasingly therapeutic culture, have everywhere taken their toll. “Adequate spiritual guidance,” wrote Reinhold Niebuhr, “can come only through a more radical political orientation and more conservative religious convictions than are comprehended in the culture of our era.”⁸ These words seem truer today than when Niebuhr first wrote them, and they may well be truer than he knew.

II. GENEROUS ORTHODOXY: TWO SAMPLES

The new catechisms are no panacea, because of course there are no panaceas. At least three generations of ever-declining catechesis, however, have not promoted the progress of the gospel. Presbyterian churches that at the turn of the last century were reeling from distasteful heresy trials enter the new millennium with an identity crisis. Excessive and ill-conceived laxity has replaced the earlier rigidity. The promise of a generous orthodoxy might be the prospect of arresting destructive pendulum swings between unsatisfactory extremes. Here are two small samples of orthodoxy and generosity as embodied in *The Study Catechism*:

Question 52. *How should I treat non-Christians and people of other religions?*

As much as I can, I should meet friendship with friendship, hostility with kindness, generosity with gratitude, persecution with forbearance, truth with agreement, and error with truth. I should express my faith with humility and devotion as the occasion requires, whether silently or openly, boldly or meekly, by word or by deed. I should avoid compromising the truth on the one hand and being narrow-minded on the other. In short, I should always welcome and accept these others in a way that honors and reflects the Lord’s welcome and acceptance of me.

Question 30. *How do you understand the uniqueness of Jesus Christ?*

No one else will ever be God incarnate. No one else will ever die for the sins of the world. Only Jesus Christ is such a person, only he could do such a work, and he in fact has done it.

Christians make large claims about Jesus Christ, but not about themselves. Humility, openness, and compassion are the only appropriate characteristics

⁸ Reinhold Niebuhr, *Reflections on the End of an Era* (New York, Scribners, 1936), ix.

for those who know that through Jesus Christ they are forgiven sinners. Christians cannot disavow Christ's uniqueness without disavowing the gospel. No mere human being, no matter how praiseworthy, can be affirmed as Lord and Savior. Only because Jesus Christ is fully God as well as also fully human is he the object of Christian worship, obedience, and confession. Christ's uniqueness as confessed by faith is the foundation of generosity, not its ruin, for his uniqueness ensures that every wall of division has been removed. "One has died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all, that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised" (2 Cor 5:14-15, RSV). Christians cannot live for Jesus Christ without renouncing a life lived only for themselves. They cannot devote themselves to him without living also for the world that he loves, indeed, the world for whose sins he gave himself to die. Remembering that they, too, are sinners whose forgiveness took place at the cross, they stand not against those who do not yet know Christ, but always with them in a solidarity of sin and grace. This solidarity is the open secret of generous orthodoxy, which knows that there is always more grace in God than sin in us. "Welcome one another, therefore, as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God" (Rom 15:7).

III. SOCIAL CONCERNS: THE INTEGRITY OF CREATION, PEACE, AND JUSTICE

Christians are called to bear social witness to Christ in two ways, first through the ordering of their common life, and second through direct action in the surrounding world. Ecclesial ordering and secular intervention comprise a unity in distinction. They are not alternatives, and may well at times blend together. Nonetheless, they are ranked in a particular way. Priority belongs (in principle) to the ordering of the church's common life. The church does not have a social ethic so much as it is a social ethic. A church whose common life merely reflects the social disorders of the surrounding world is scarcely in a strong position for social witness through direct action. In such cases—and where is this not the case?—the gospel must progress in spite of the church, and against its failures. Here too there is more grace in God than sin in us. Note that social witness, whose direct action cannot always wait for the proper ordering of the church's common life, must proceed on several fronts at once. Nevertheless, social witness in discipleship to Christ requires the church to be a countercultural community with its own distinctive profile. It must stand over against the larger culture when that culture's values are incompatible with the gospel. No doubt a church that emphasizes distinctiveness at the expense of solidarity falsifies itself by

becoming sectarian. A church that loses its distinctiveness, however, through conformity and capitulation, evades its essential vocation of discipleship, especially when it means bearing the cross for being socially dissident. A Christian is an unreliable partisan who knows that peace with God means conflict with the world (even as peace with the world means conflict with God). "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored?" (Matt 5:13). "You are the light of the world" (Matt 5:14). Disciples are not above their teacher (Matt 10:24).

The rule for social witness is that faithfulness is a higher virtue than effectiveness. Some things ought indeed to be done regardless of whether by human calculations they promise to be effective; and other things ought not to be done, no matter how effective they may promise to be. An example of the first would be things that are so evil that they need to be opposed regardless of whether they can be prevented. An example of the second would be adopting impermissible means to attain commendable ends. The latter merits special comment. Effectiveness pursued at the expense of faithfulness, which is always the church's undoing, very often arises from the allure of attaining commendable ends through impermissible means. This heedless strategy is nothing more than disobedience rooted in a basic distrust in God. It calls the divine sovereignty, wisdom, and beneficence into question. It doubts that God is faithful. At the same time, it miscalculates what will actually result after impermissible means are employed. The God who brings good out of evil and life out of death is the God who requires the church to speak truth to power come what may. The God whose foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and whose weakness is stronger than human might, is the God who calls the church into ever renewed conformity with its Lord through apparently senseless actions of compassion, noncompliance, and illustration. Note that faithfulness need not be in conflict with effectiveness. Both values are always to be maximized as much as possible. But in conflict situations, which are by no means uncommon, there can be no doubt which direction is expected of the church and commanded by its Lord. "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt 6:33, KJV). "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom 12:21, RSV). "For the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).

With these principles in mind—the priority of the church's ordering over its direct action in the world, and the priority of faithfulness over effectiveness—the theme of social witness in the catechism may be pursued.

The Integrity of Creation

Whether the human race will survive the next century is not clear. What is clear is that the means and mechanisms of self-extinction already exist. The bane of modern technology may turn out to be greater than the boon. Ecological destruction is the slow version for which the quick version is nuclear war and its military analogues, with the intermediate version as overpopulation and the gross maldistribution of resources. Widespread devastation, falling short of self-extinction, could still be severe. At the level of technology and social policy, Christians qua Christians will have no special expertise with respect to details. What they have to offer through their social witness is an orientation and direction. Through ordering (or reordering) their common life as well as through direct action in the world, they will always stand, without neglecting the threat of divine judgment, for the possibility of repentance and the reality of hope. They will challenge the technological imperative, which holds that "if it can be done, it must be done," as the symptom of a larger idolatry of human self-mastery and deceit. They will seek to break with destructive habits of consumption, heedless waste of earth's resources, and unrestrained pursuit of private gain at the expense of public good. How to adopt more simple, sustainable patterns of living, not least in the ordering of the church's common life, as well as in the private lives of individual Christians, awaits serious discussion and implementation in the church.

Question 19. *As creatures made in God's image, what responsibility do we have for the earth?*

God commands us to care for the earth in ways that reflect God's loving care for us. We are responsible for ensuring that earth's gifts be used fairly and wisely, that no creature suffers from the abuse of what we are given, and that future generations may continue to enjoy the abundance and goodness of the earth in praise to God.

The catechism can do little more than establish generous orthodoxy's basic outlook. Here it undertakes a modest act of theological repentance. Widely publicized criticisms have not implausibly shown how the biblical injunction to "fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen 1:28) has served to underwrite ecological irresponsibility more often than one would wish. What these criticisms overlook, however, in their zeal to establish blame, is not only the indeterminacy of the text, but also the larger theological resources that scriptural communities possess, not to mention the possibility of their learning from

past mistakes. New occasions teach new readings—as well as new duties that were unforeseen.

Scriptural communities, whether Christian or Jewish, have always known that the earth belongs to another than themselves. “The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it” (Ps 24:1). They have known that they are not the proprietors but only custodians of a world they have received as a gift. “The heavens are yours, the earth also is yours; the world and all that is in it—you have founded them” (Ps 89:11). They have also seen that profound disorders in our relationship to God inevitably have earthly consequences: “The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant” (Isa 24:5). Finally, they have known, to cite a specifically Christian example, that grace offers the uplifting possibility of renewal despite grievous sins of the past: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom 12:2). These verses as just cited are among the ones appended in the catechism to Question 19. While the limits to this approach are obvious, the catechism at least makes a beginning. It orients catechized Christians toward ecological responsibility in a way consonant with traditional faith.

Nonviolence and Peace

Modern warfare with all its horrors has been the defining experience of the twentieth century. A few statistics help tell the story. In this century, more than 100 million people have died in major wars—out of an estimated 149 million total since the first century. In most wars fought in the 1990s, the vast majority of deaths were civilian. In 1995, world military expenditures amounted to more than \$1.4 million per minute. An estimated \$8 trillion dollars has been spent since 1945 on nuclear weapons. The world stockpile of nuclear weapons, despite recent reductions, still represents over 700 times the explosive power in the twentieth century’s three major wars, which killed 44 million people.⁹ The church urgently needs to reconsider how it can be more faithful to the gospel of peace amid this unprecedented world-historical crisis.

(1) *No Power but the Power of Love.* The very idea of “social witness” implies an orientation toward the centrality of God. It means that Christian

⁹ See William Eckhardt, “War-Related Deaths Since 3000 B.C.,” *Bulletin of Peace Proposals* (December 1991); Ruth Leger Sivard, *World Military and Social Expenditures 1996* (Washington, DC: World Priorities, 1996); Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).

social action, whether within the community of faith or the larger world, is more than an end in itself. This action does not simply aim to alleviate social misery in the form of hunger, nakedness, homelessness, terror, illness, humiliation, loneliness, and abuse. Efforts to name and oppose social injustice, no matter how important and necessary, are only one aspect of "social witness." As Aristotle has pointed out, any given action or policy can be an end in itself while also serving as the means to a greater end. As important as bread is to us, we do not live by bread alone. Human flourishing, as we know from the gospel, depends on more than the alleviation of social misery and the satisfaction of earthly needs. The main purpose for which we were created is to glorify and enjoy God forever.

This purpose is acknowledged by social witness in at least two ways. First, Christian social witness is parabolic in intent. It aims, in all its forms, to enact parables of God's compassion for the world. Although not all needs are alike, with some lesser or greater than others, God cares for us as whole persons in all our needs. The highest purpose for which we were created is not always remembered in this context. Being created to live by and for God, we know a need that only God can fulfill. Because we are creatures fallen into sin, moreover, we also endure a terrible plight, fatal and self-inflicted, from which we are helpless to free ourselves, but can be rescued only by God, without which we would be cut off from God and one another forever. According to the gospel, God has not abandoned us without hope to this plight, for God does not will to be God without us. On the contrary, God has spared no cost to rescue us. The point is this. No human action, not even by the church, can do for us what God has done, or be for us what God indeed is, at the deepest level of human need. Human action can nonetheless, by grace, serve as a witness. It can point away from itself to God. It can enact parables of compassion that proclaim the gospel. In addressing itself wholeheartedly to lesser needs, Christian social witness points at the same time to God as the only remedy for our greatest need. Christian social witness, in its efforts to alleviate social misery, is thus at once an end in itself while also serving as the means to a greater end.

Second, social witness cannot be parabolic in intent without also being analogical in form. It must correspond to the content it would attest. It cannot point to God without corresponding to God. Correspondence to God is the basic criterion of social witness, and it is this criterion that makes faithfulness more important than effectiveness. The validity of Christian social witness cannot be judged by immediate consequences alone. It must rather be judged, primarily, by the quality of its correspondence to God's compassion as

revealed and embodied in Jesus Christ. No social witness can be valid that contradicts faithful correspondence, even when that means leaving the consequences to God. Consequences are in any case greatly overrated with respect to their predictability and controllability, just as they are also commonly misjudged when uncompromising faithfulness results in real or apparent failures.

It is no accident that the words *witness* and *martyr* are semantically related. The promise of the gospel is that faithful witness, whether successful in worldly terms or not, will always be validated by God. To believe that supposed effectiveness in violation of faithfulness is promised similar validation can only be illusory. No comprehensive policy of social action, regardless of what it is, will ever be without elements of helplessness, tragedy, and trade-off in the face of human misery. It is always a mistake for faithfulness to overpromise what it can deliver in resisting evil or effecting social change, though it may sometimes be surprisingly effective, or even compatible with maximal effectiveness, depending on the case. Social witness qua witness, in any case, cannot allow itself to be determined primarily by the question of effectiveness, but rather by faithful correspondence to the cruciform compassion of God.

The unprecedented horrors of modern warfare raise acute questions for Christian social witness with respect to nonviolence and peace. Who exactly is the God to whom Christian social action would bear witness? What forms of social action (whether in ecclesial ordering or secular intervention and participation) would correspond to the prior and determinative reality of God? How is God's power exercised in the world, and how is it related to God's love? What does it mean to say that God is omnipotent? Although these and other questions require greater treatment than can be afforded here, we are already in the vicinity of the first article of The Apostles' Creed:

Question 7. *What do you believe when you confess your faith in "God the Father Almighty"?*

That God is a God of love, and that God's love is powerful beyond measure.

Question 8. *How do you understand the love and power of God?*

Through Jesus Christ. In his life of compassion, his death on the cross, and his resurrection from the dead, I see how vast is God's love for the world—a love that is ready to suffer for our sakes, yet so strong that nothing will prevail against it.

Question 9. *What comfort do you receive from this truth?*

This powerful and loving God is the one whose promises I may trust in all the circumstances of my life, and to whom I belong in life and in death.

Question 10. *Do you make this confession only as an individual?*

No. With the apostles, prophets and martyrs, with all those through the ages who have loved the Lord Jesus Christ, and with all who strive to serve him on earth here and now, I confess my faith in the God of loving power and powerful love.

Here again, although the catechism cannot do everything, it can at least do something. By interpreting the divine power in terms of the divine love, it establishes a basic orientation and direction for social witness. It establishes the presumption that no social witness can be valid that exercises or endorses power in flagrant violation of love. Many questions necessarily remain open. In the tradition, these questions circulate around the place of law, justice, and coercion in the work of love, and around the perceived need for recognizing "two realms," at least one of which (the secular realm) is thought to necessitate power structures, authorities, and policies that are not only coercive but at times inevitably and perhaps massively violent.

Without rejecting these traditional perceptions wholesale, the catechism generally places a question mark beside them (in their commonly received forms). Much depends on whether certain countervailing divine attributes (like mercy and righteousness, or love and wrath) are best understood dualistically, through a "pattern of disjunction," or else integratively, through a "pattern of mutual inclusion." In the second pattern, the positive divine qualities would be seen as including and fundamentally determining the negative ones, with the latter being expressions of the former. Stronger constraints than traditional are thereby placed on adhering directly to compassion in faithful witness, on pain of severe dis-analogy to the God ostensibly attested.¹⁰ (Note that the question of which pattern for the divine attributes is valid is logically independent of its social consequences. That question must be decided on its own merits. One of the most lamentable aspects of

¹⁰ In other words, the constraints are definitely weaker when (with the normal Augustinian tradition), the pattern of disjunction is in force. In that case, the divine righteousness, holiness, and wrath are viewed as operating, in some strong sense, alongside and independent of the divine mercy, grace, and love. This split in God then warrants a corresponding split in earthly life between the spiritual (ecclesial) and the secular realms, with correspondingly different ethical norms supposedly applying to each domain. Representatives of this tradition, like Calvin, acknowledge that the pattern of disjunction makes it seem as though God's being is in tragic conflict with itself. Whether this is really the proper point at which to invoke, as they do, the divine inscrutability, is one of the key points disputed by those who adhere to the pattern of mutual inclusion.

contemporary Christian social ethics is the unconscionable tendency to manipulate the doctrine of God in order to generate what are perceived as desirable social outcomes. Such instrumentalizing of God stands in flagrant violation of faithful witness, making God into little more than the object of wish fulfillment and projection. T. S. Eliot is still right that the greatest treason is to do the right thing for the wrong reason.)

(2) *The Nonviolent Cross*. The catechism explains the first article of the creed on a christocentric basis. It appeals to Jesus Christ's Incarnation, crucifixion, and Resurrection to validate the conviction that God's power is immanent in God's love. Jesus Christ's life history clarifies the whole history of the covenant. It shows definitively that God knows no power but the power of love and that God's love is powerful. It reveals how free and strong that love is—so free it is “ready to suffer for our sakes, yet so strong that nothing will prevail against it.” A challenge thereby surfaces against too readily accepting any analysis that would pit “powerless love” against “loveless power,” with the latter condoned as a necessary evil. Although loveless power cannot be denied as the terrible reality it is, the gospel includes the great promise that in the ultimate scheme of things there is no such thing as powerless or ineffective love.

How is the ultimate reality of love's triumph to be faithfully attested here and now? Will not the implicit constraints of love, as argued here, on the permissible uses of power have deleterious consequences? Will not preventable evils be accepted, and attainable goods be sacrificed, if social witness inordinately restricts itself to forms of suffering love? The historic differences on these matters within the broad Christian tradition will undoubtedly persist. Yet does the cross of Christ not seem clearly to establish a strong presumption that social witness will most fittingly take shape through actions and policies of nonviolence, not excluding resistance and direct action, even to the point, perhaps, of civil disobedience, civilian-based defense, and conscientious objection to unjust wars? Why should the grotesque sacrifices required by armed conflict automatically seem more necessary and promising than the sacrifices that undeniably would be required by alternative strategies of nonviolence? Does the unprecedented world-historical military crisis not call the church to reexamine whether it has fully taken the measure of the faithfulness required by its Lord? Can the church today responsibly participate in the preparations and mechanisms of mass destruction? Can it pretend that the history of the twentieth century did not occur?

The triumph of God's suffering love, as revealed and embodied in Christ, is a theme that unifies the entire catechism. The catechism conveys the basic Christian conviction that in reigning from the cross, the suffering love of God

has triumphed in its very weakness over all that is hostile to itself (cf. 1 Cor 1:25). Here is one example of this theme:

Question 41. *How did Jesus Christ fulfill the office of king?*

He was the Lord who took the form of a servant; he perfected royal power in weakness. With no sword but the sword of righteousness, and no power but the power of love, Christ defeated sin, evil and death by reigning from the cross.

Relative to historic Reformed standards, the catechism offers an interpretation of Christ's threefold office that is unique in being thoroughly christocentric. It is not the office that defines Christ, but Christ who defines the office. Here the royal aspect of the threefold office is defined as centered on the cross. The divine strategy for defeating sin, evil, and death—*regnantem in cruce*—is fulfilled in suffering love. "God does not use violent means to obtain what he desires," wrote Irenaeus.¹¹ God does not liberate us from our captivity, echoed Gregory of Nyssa, "by a violent exercise of force."¹² Since the greatness of the divine power is revealed disconcertingly in the form of the cross, how can Christian social witness fail to match? The basic criterion of faithful social witness (conformity to the God whose action is attested) would seem to point the church in principle toward strategies of nonviolent love.

An important test for nonviolent social witness is whether it can incorporate a strong element of justice. If this witness meant simply capitulating to evil, violence, and abuse, it would not only be deficient in itself, but also in its testimony to God. For God is not merciful without also being righteous, nor gracious without also being holy, nor loving without also being wrathful toward everything that tramples on love. Domestic and sexual violence, for example, long suppressed from the light of day in church and society, have recently emerged to illustrate how traditional pastoral counsels to submission, whether well-meaning or thoughtless, can be tragically mistaken and abused. Nonviolence is not the opposite of resistance and prudence. It is the opposite of vindictiveness, retaliation, and hatred—including policies or actions based on them. It recognizes that there is a time to resist and a time to flee as well as a time to suffer and submit. It allows for nonretaliatory initiatives of protest and self-defense. It nonetheless finds it hard to understand how one can love one's enemies by killing them. It is prepared, if necessary, to suffer and die for peace rather than kill for peace. Its deepest motivation is not to keep itself

¹¹ Irenaeus, "Against Heresies," in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 1, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 527.

¹² Gregory of Nyssa, "The Great Catechism, XXII," in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, Vol. 5, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 492.

morally pure, but to bear faithful witness through conformity to the enacted patterns of divine love. It believes, when grounded in the gospel, that sin can be forgiven without being condoned, for this is how we are all forgiven by God:

Question 81. *Does forgiveness mean that God condones sin?*

No. God does not cease to be God. Although God is merciful, God does not condone what God forgives. In the death and resurrection of Christ, God judges what God abhors—everything hostile to love—by abolishing it at the very roots. In this judgment the unexpected occurs: good is brought out of evil, hope out of hopelessness, and life out of death. God spares sinners, and turns them from enemies into friends. The uncompromising judgment of God is revealed in the suffering love of the cross.

The social witness of the catechism to nonviolence and peace takes place mainly at the level of its affirmations about God. It affirms that as revealed and embodied in Jesus Christ, God's power is the power of love, that it reigns over all that would oppose it, and that it triumphs through the suffering of the cross. The church cannot possibly be faithful in witness without meditating on the heart of the gospel. While not all disagreements are likely to be removed, a strong presumption toward nonviolence is required by the cross. Arising from the gospel as considered in itself, this presumption seems especially urgent for the century ahead. Trusting in the sure promises of God, social witness will ever need to ponder anew that fellowship with Christ does not exclude fellowship with him in his sufferings. "God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Cor 1:9). "I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord . . . that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that if possible I may obtain the resurrection from the dead" (Phil 3:8, 10–11).¹³

Social Justice

The catechism takes the same approach to social justice as it does toward ecological responsibility and peace. It offers an orientation and direction, no

¹³ It might be noted that the catechism acknowledges the reality of institutional violence. It thereby goes beyond traditional Reformed catechisms, for it interprets the Ten Commandments as pertaining to more than relations between individuals. For the commandment against murder, it offers this explanation:

Question 108. *What do you learn from this commandment?*

God forbids anything that harms my neighbor unfairly. Murder or injury can be done not only by direct violence but also by an angry word or a clever plan, and not only by an individual but also by unjust social institutions. I should honor every human being, including my enemy, as a person made in God's image.

A context is thus established (among other things) for naming institutional violence and seeking to end it.

more, no less. It establishes work for social justice on the basis of traditional faith, especially as interpreted christocentrically. Six areas in particular may be noted: against social prejudice, solidarity with the oppressed, concern for the poor, social witness without resignation, full equality for women in church and society, and systemic focus.

(1) *Against Social Prejudice.* A neglected theme of holy scripture is the connection between lies and violence. Where there is the one, scripture recognizes, there is likely to be the other. Violence (as for example when perpetrated by governments or powerful social groups) commonly requires lies to conceal itself, just as lies commonly prepare the way for brutality and abuse. Lies are a form of verbal violence, just as violence is the ultimate defamation of the other. Relevant verses from the Psalms and the prophets are cited by Paul. In the long, harrowing passage on the divine wrath at the opening of his Letter to the Romans, the apostle writes: "Their throats are opened graves; they use their tongues to deceive. The venom of vipers is under their lips. . . . Their feet are swift to shed blood" (Rom 3:13, 15). In explicating the commandment that forbids false witness against one's neighbor, the catechism draws attention to this scriptural insight:

Question 115. *Does this commandment forbid racism and other forms of negative stereotyping?*

Yes. In forbidding false witness against my neighbor, God forbids me to be prejudiced against people who belong to any vulnerable, different or disfavored social group. Jews, women, homosexuals, racial and ethnic minorities, and national enemies are among those who have suffered terribly from being subjected to the slurs of social prejudice. Negative stereotyping is a form of falsehood that invites actions of humiliation, abuse, and violence as forbidden by the commandment against murder.

No previous Reformed catechism, to my knowledge, has named social prejudice and negative stereotyping as a violation of the ninth commandment. Nor has any sought to explain how the commandments against false witness and murder are interconnected. Confessing and repenting of social sins have rarely been emphasized in church catechesis as strongly as they have been for personal sins. Finding a convincing basis within the tradition for redressing this unhappy imbalance has clear advantages for the church over other strategies. Antisemitism, misogyny, homophobia, racial prejudice, and the demonizing of enemies all stand in direct violation of the ninth commandment. They have all implicated the church in murder. It will be a wonderful day when social prejudice and negative stereotyping are disorders that the church finds only in the surrounding world. Until then, actions against social

prejudice belong above all in the renewing of minds within the ordering of the church's common life. How much longer, for example, will the de facto segregation of the churches in the United States continue to ratify and perpetuate the American system of apartheid? How can the churches expect to bear faithful witness to the reconciliation accomplished at the cross when they fail to be fellowships of reconciliation in themselves? Antiracism programs recently approved for use within PC(USA) congregations are a step in the right direction. "Speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all the destitute. Speak out, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy" (Prov 31:8-9).

(2) *Solidarity with the Oppressed*. A recurring phenomenon in the history of Christian theology has been the displacement of central truths by lesser truths. Usually these displacements are more or less temporary. Nevertheless, they can cause great confusion while they last. Polarizations and animosities typically form between two groups—those in their wisdom who passionately reject one truth that they might recover the centrality of another, and those who do much the same thing only in reverse. In such cases, the solution arises when central truths are allowed to be central and lesser truths are allowed to be lesser. The truth of neither is denied, and room can even be found for allowing the lesser truths, perhaps previously unnoticed or neglected, to assume the urgency of situational precedence.¹⁴

During the last twenty-five years or so, the church has increasingly witnessed the emergence of victim-oriented soteriologies. The plight of victims, variously specified and defined, has been urged by prominent theologians as the central soteriological problem. It can scarcely be denied that the history of the twentieth century has pushed the plight of victims to the fore. Nor can it be denied that the church has too often seemed ill-equipped to bring the plight of victims, especially victims of oppression and social injustice, clearly into focus for itself so that reasonable and faithful remedies might be sought. Victim-oriented soteriologies have undoubtedly made an important contribution to a better understanding of the church's social responsibility.

Polarizations and animosities have developed, however, to the extent that the plight of victims has displaced the soteriological plight of sinners, or even

¹⁴ This kind of flexibility between de jure and de facto considerations was recognized by Calvin. Commenting on a scriptural passage whose syntactical ordering places duties to others before duties to God, Calvin wrote: "Nor is it strange that he begins with the duties of love of neighbor. For although the worship of God has precedence and ought rightly to come first, yet justice which is practiced in human relations is the true evidence of devotion to God" (Calvin, "Commentary on Micah 6:6-8," in *Calvin: Commentaries*, ed. Joseph Haroutunian [Philadelphia-Westminster, 1958], 316).

eclipsed it. Victim-oriented soteriologies have unfortunately tended to define the meaning of sin entirely in terms of victimization. Sin ceases to be a universal category. It attaches to perpetrators and to them alone. Since by definition victims qua victims are innocent of being perpetrators, they are to that extent innocent of sin. If sin attaches only to perpetrators, however, victims can be sinners only by somehow becoming perpetrators themselves (a move not unknown in victim-oriented soteriologies). Victim-oriented soteriologies, with their bipolar opposition between victims and perpetrators, display a logic with sectarian tendencies.

How the cross of Christ is understood by these soteriologies is also worth noting. The cross becomes meaningful because it shows the divine solidarity with victims, generally ceasing to find any other relevance, at least positively. (In extreme cases, the theology of the cross is trashed as a cause of victimization. But such denunciations, when meant *de jure*, exceed the bounds even of heterodoxy and so cease to be of constructive interest to the church.) The cross, in any case, is no longer the supreme divine intervention for the forgiveness of sins. It is not surprising that more traditional, sin-oriented soteriologies should react with unfortunate polarization. When that happens, however, sin as a universal category obscures the plight of oppression's victims, rendering that plight just as invisible or irrelevant as it was before. Atonement without solidarity seems to exhaust the significance of the cross, and forgiveness supposedly occurs without judgment on oppression.

The task of generous orthodoxy in this situation is to dispel polarization by letting central truths be central, and lesser truths be lesser, but in each case letting truth be truth. No reason exists why the cross as atonement for sin should be viewed as logically incompatible with the cross as divine solidarity with the oppressed. Good reasons can be found for connecting them. The great historical, ecumenical consensus remains, however, that the central significance of the cross, as attested by holy scripture, is the forgiveness of sins. This established consensus pervades every aspect of the church's life, not least including baptism and the Lord's Supper. It has by this time withstood all the onslaughts of unbelieving modernity (so that the only question today is not whether the ecumenical consensus will survive but whether those churches devitalized by modern skepticism will). It is reflected throughout the new catechism.¹⁵ No ecclesial catechesis can be valid that fails to affirm the forgiveness of sins as the central truth of the cross.

¹⁵ The treatment of our Lord's priestly office may be mentioned as an example.

Question 40. *How did Jesus Christ fulfill the office of priest?*

He was the Lamb of God that took away the sin of the world; he became our priest and sacrifice in one. Confronted by our hopelessness in sin and death, Christ interceded by offering himself—his entire person and work—in order to reconcile us to God.

Lesser truths, however, ought not to be pitted against central truths. Lesser truths, moreover, gain rather than diminish in significance when decentered, for they no longer have a role foisted upon them that they cannot possibly fulfill. Generous orthodoxy as evidenced in the catechism attempts to do justice to both central and lesser truths in themselves as well as to their proper ordering.

Question 42. *What do you affirm when you say that he “suffered under Pontius Pilate”?*

First, that our Lord was humiliated, rejected and abused by the temporal authorities of his day, both religious and political. Christ thus aligned himself with all human beings who are oppressed, tortured, or otherwise shamefully treated by those with worldly power. Second, and even more importantly, that our Lord, though innocent, submitted himself to condemnation by an earthly judge so that through him we ourselves, though guilty, might be acquitted before our heavenly Judge.

The oppressed have always understood that the cross brings them consolation and hope by placing God into solidarity with their misery. The African American spiritual is exactly right when it laments, “Nobody knows the trouble I’ve seen. Nobody knows but Jesus.” The gospel does not obscure that our Lord was “mocked and insulted and spat upon” (Luke 18:32), that he was “despised and rejected” by others (Isa 53:3). Admittedly, the church has not always kept pace with scripture in recognizing that “The Lord is a stronghold for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble” (Ps 9:9). It has not always prayed fervently enough with the psalmist: “May he defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the needy, and crush the oppressor” (Ps 72:4), nor has it always acted conscientiously enough on the basis of such prayers. Social witness has a perpetual obligation to solidarity with the oppressed. This obligation, however, is entirely consonant with the truth (which can be displaced only at our peril) on which the entire gospel depends: “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor 5:21).

(3) *Concern for the Poor.* When the universality of sin is recognized as the central soteriological problem, the results can be liberating. All illusions are dispelled, for example, that though others may be needy, I am not, and that I am therefore somehow above others if I am in a position to help them in their need. Acknowledging my need, conversely, brings no implication that I am beneath others who may help me. When recognition is accorded to the universality of divine grace, moreover, I am freed from moralistic forms of obligation. For when grounded in the reception of grace, social obligation is

not an externally imposed duty, but a response to the needs of others in gratitude to the God who has already responded so graciously to me. My response to others is based on a solidarity in sin and grace. It occurs as an act of witness to the gospel and through participation in the grace of God. "Walk in love, as Christ has loved us and gave himself up for us" (Eph 5:2).

Question 64 in the catechism states that the mission of the church is to extend mercy and forgiveness to "the needy" in ways that point to Christ. The next question follows with a definition:

Question 65. *Who are the needy?*

The hungry need bread, the homeless need a roof, the oppressed need justice, and the lonely need fellowship. At the same time—on another and deeper level—the hopeless need hope, sinners need forgiveness, and the world needs the gospel. On this level no one is excluded, and all the needy are one. Our mission as the church is to bring hope to a desperate world by declaring God's undying love—as one beggar tells another where to find bread.

The ordering principle that distinguishes and unites our lesser needs with our central need is again in evidence. Our lesser needs are related to our central need by a unity in distinction. Concern for the poor and needy stands in inseparable unity with the forgiveness of sins, without displacing it or becoming a substitute for it. The catechism makes a similar move when it explains the fourth petition of the Lord's Prayer:

Question 130. *What is meant by the fourth petition, "Give us today our daily bread"?*

We ask God to provide for all our needs, for we know that God, who cares for us in every area of our life, has promised us temporal as well as spiritual blessings. God commands us to pray each day for all that we need and no more, so that we will learn to rely completely on God. We pray that we will use what we are given wisely, remembering especially the poor and the needy. Along with every living creature we look to God, the source of all generosity, to bless us and nourish us, according to the divine good pleasure.

Concern for the poor and the needy has a solid basis in traditional faith, as when linked with this petition of the Lord's Prayer. Through the recovery of sound catechesis, concern for the poor, among other things, could become more deeply embedded in the life of the church. A person who fears and blesses the Lord "opens her hand to the poor, and reaches out her hands to the needy" (Prov 31:20). It will be a great day when congregations not only give money to help the poor, but also create situations in which the poor feel welcome to participate in the life and work of the congregations themselves.

(4) *Social Witness without Resignation.* Hope for the next world has sometimes been thought to relieve us of responsibility for this one. The catechism connects our ultimate hope indivisibly to our smaller hopes, without confusing them. It grounds all our hopes in the gracious reconciliation accomplished at the cross. Urging constancy in work and prayer, it promotes social witness without resignation:

Question 86. *Does resurrection hope mean that we don't have to take action to relieve the suffering of this world?*

No. When the great hope is truly alive, small hopes arise even now for alleviating the sufferings of the present time. Reconciliation—with God, with one another, and with oneself—is the great hope God has given to the world. While we commit to God the needs of the whole world in our prayers, we also know that we are commissioned to be instruments of God's peace. When hostility, injustice and suffering are overcome here and now, we anticipate the end of all things—the life that God brings out of death, which is the meaning of resurrection hope.

(5) *Full Equality of Women in Church and Society.* The catechism presupposes that the full equality of women in church and society is compatible with the heart of the gospel as understood by traditional faith. Although this presupposition is strongly contested today, the many complexities cannot be discussed here. From the standpoint of generous orthodoxy, however, “defecting in place,” as advocated by some, is, regretfully, not always easy to distinguish from defecting from the gospel. As one avowedly post-Christian feminist theologian has shrewdly argued, Christians must at least believe that Jesus Christ is unique. She then goes on to show that this very minimal condition is not met by a number of avowedly Christian feminist theologians, some of whom are quite prominent.¹⁶ Since she believes that feminism and the gospel cannot possibly be reconciled, she challenges these theologians to quit the church. Their responses are not always encouraging. If no better reasons can be found for not quitting the church than the merely expedient ones commonly offered for “defecting in place,” feminist concerns face dismal prospects outside narrow circles.

It is fortunate that a younger generation of feminist theologians is emerging. (I am thinking, for example, of figures such as Katherine Sonderegger of Middlebury, Judith Gundry-Volf of Yale, and Ellen Charry of Princeton.) They promise to bring a new level of sophistication to the important, though not always well known, work of ground-breaking activist groups such as Christians for Biblical Equality. Gender equality and the elimination of male

¹⁶ Daphne Hampson, *Theology and Feminism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 59–66, 156–60.

privilege are too important to be left to the tragically confused who think they can blame constitutive elements of the gospel for women's oppression, while gaining a wide hearing in the church. Both logically and psychologically, the contradiction is intolerable. It will inevitably resolve itself in one of two ways: either by reconciling feminism with biblical faith or else by choosing feminism over biblical faith and quitting the church. Halfway measures, whatever their appeal, will be abortive. A challenge to generous orthodoxy, yet to be adequately met, is how to reconcile feminist concerns with traditional faith. The direction, however, is clear: "Be subject to one another out of reverence to Christ" (Eph 5:21). The church awaits a feminism that is both orthodox and generous.

The catechism makes its own effort, however modest, in opting for the hopeful alternative. A simple misconception is cleared up:

Question 11. *When the creed speaks of "God the Father," does it mean that God is male?*

No. Only creatures having bodies can be either male or female. But God has no body, since by nature God is Spirit. Holy Scripture reveals God as a living God beyond all sexual distinctions. Scripture uses diverse images for God, female as well as male. We read, for example, that God will no more forget us than a woman can forget her nursing child (Isa 49:15). "'As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you,' says the Lord" (Isa 66:13).

Beyond that, male privilege is disallowed, abuse is condemned, and women's full participation in the leadership in the church is affirmed:

Question 13. *When you confess the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, are you elevating men over women and endorsing male domination?*

No. Human power and authority are trustworthy only as they reflect God's mercy and kindness, not abusive patterns of domination. As Jesus taught his disciples, "The greatest among you will be your servant" (Matt 23:11). God the Father sets the standard by which all misuses of power are exposed and condemned. "Call no one your father on earth," said Jesus, "for you have one Father—the one in heaven" (Matt 23:9). In fact God calls women and men to all ministries of the church.

Many questions remain to be addressed, but once again, in its own way, the catechism makes a start.

(6) *Systemic Focus.* Although the gospel provides every reason for Christians not to be moralistic, they not only too often are moralistic, but also allow moralism to substitute for clear-sighted social analysis. They fail to inquire

very deeply into the logic of incentives established by social and economic systems. Though not always free of this problem, Calvin can be an exemplary corrective. Ever alert to the disorders of the human heart, he does not restrict his social criticism to spiritual disorders alone. For example, in a comment on Isaiah 2:12, 16, relevant to our own day regarding the way impoverished, debt-ridden peoples are treated by affluent nations, Calvin wrote: "Trade carried on with far-off foreign nations is often replete with cheating and extortion, and no limit is set to the profits." Commerce is condemned by the prophet, he noted, "because it has infected the land with many corruptions." When abundance is accumulated by exploiting the vulnerable and defenseless, Calvin concluded, it only "increases pride and cruelty."¹⁷ Human beings "steal," wrote Calvin in another place, "not only when they secretly take the property of others, but also when they make money by injuring others, accumulate wealth in objectionable ways, or are more concerned with their own advantage than with justice."¹⁸

The catechism (modestly) makes explicit the systemic consciousness that seems nascent in Calvin's ruminations. It recognizes that theft can be more than just a moral or spiritual phenomenon. In explaining the eighth commandment, it states:

Question 112. *What do you learn from this commandment?*

God forbids all theft and robbery, including schemes, tricks or systems that unjustly take what belongs to someone else. God requires me not to be driven by greed, not to misuse or waste the gifts I have been given, and not to distrust the promise that God will supply my needs.

Dispositions toward greed, abuse, and waste are not merely moral disorders but also specifically spiritual ones, rooted in distrust and disobedience to God. At the same time, they can also find institutionalized expression through the logic of incentives built into large-scale social and economic systems. It is this latter dimension that the church must take more seriously today than in the past in order to exercise social responsibility in the modern world. Although large areas for discussion and disagreement remain, the church can only gain by including a greater systemic focus within its concerns. Again, typical mistakes will need to be avoided which pit moral, spiritual, and institutional considerations against one another. As the catechism recognizes, they are interconnected. A systemic focus would foster a new sensitivity to forms of exploitation and oppression that the church, especially in affluent countries, cannot responsibly shrug off with cheap resignation. Large-scale, non-

¹⁷ Calvin, "Commentary on Isa. 2:12, 16," in *Calvin: Commentaries*, 350.

¹⁸ Calvin, "Commentary on Ex. 20-15/Deut.5:19," in *Calvin-Commentaries*, 328-9.

governmental initiatives—modelled perhaps on the Pauline collection in apostolic times—might be among the strategies the international church could adopt in addressing the scandalous differentials of wealth and poverty within its own ranks, though broad-based and multidimensional initiatives of various kinds are urgently needed by the vast majority who constitute the world's poor.

IV. CONCLUSION

This essay has sought to explain how the new catechism supports social witness on the basis of generous orthodoxy. It has argued for two principles that, though not explicit in the catechism, are consonant with it: the *de jure* precedence of ordering the church's common life so that it accords with the gospel (without discounting direct action in the surrounding world), and, more controversially, effectiveness within the limits of faithfulness alone. The chief criterion of social witness, it has been argued, is conformity to the enacted patterns of the divine compassion as revealed and embodied in Jesus Christ. The established ecumenical concern for justice, peace, and the integrity of creation was interpreted (in reverse order) within this context. The catechism promotes ecological responsibility through its instruction about the image of God. It establishes a strong presumption to nonviolence through its teachings on the cross of Christ. Last but not least, it encourages social justice in the following ways: (1) by opposing negative stereotyping on the basis of the ninth commandment, (2) by establishing ecclesial solidarity with the oppressed on the basis of the prior divine solidarity, (3) by highlighting a biblical concern for the plight of the poor, (4) by opposing weak resignation in the face of social evils, (5) by calling for women's full equality and the elimination of male privilege on a biblical basis that the entire church can take seriously, and (6) by recognizing a systemic focus for the church's social responsibility in the modern world. In these ways, an attempt was made to show how progressive political aspirations can be grounded in traditional faith, when interpreted with the catechism, in the form of generous orthodoxy.¹⁹

¹⁹ The Study Catechism can be obtained in a handsome edition, which includes fully written-out scripture references for each question, from Presbyterians for Renewal, 8134 New LaGrange Road, Suite 227, Louisville, Kentucky 40222-4679, USA. (FAX: 502-423-8329). The cost is US \$4.00 per copy. No edition of *The First Catechism* is currently available from this source. Versions of both catechisms—without the inclusion of written-out scripture verses—can be obtained in inexpensive editions from The Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 100 Witherspoon Street, Louisville, Kentucky 40202-1396, USA.

Rerooting the Faith: The Coherence and Significance of the Reformation

by SCOTT H. HENDRIX

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I. REFORMATION HISTORY AND DOCTRINE?

IT IS MY HONOR and also my great pleasure to deliver this inaugural lecture as the James Hastings Nichols Professor of Reformation History and Doctrine. I did not know the man for whom this chair is named, but I do know that he was a fine historian who was dedicated to the church in both its Reformed depth and its ecumenical breadth. From the remarks of Karlfried Froehlich made in Miller Chapel at a memorial service for James Hastings Nichols in 1991, I also know that he had a profound impact on the teaching of church history at Princeton Theological Seminary, and I am pleased that this chair can be associated with his legacy. I trust he is not disturbed by the fact that a Lutheran is holding a Reformation chair named after him, since his own work on the Mercersburg tradition and his involvement in the ecumenical movement testify to his appreciation for the entire church catholic.

When President Gillespie and I discussed the name of this chair, I welcomed the Nichols' designation, but I was not certain about the rest of the title: Professor of Reformation History and Doctrine. At first, I was inclined to offer an alternative, but then I decided to keep the title as proposed because it offered a challenge that fits the direction of my own work. Why is this title a challenge? It is a challenge because some people today would question the aptness of the phrase "Reformation history and doctrine." There are, to be sure, histories of the Reformation and doctrines of the Reformation, but few scholars would be willing to turn these phrases around and to speak simply of Reformation history and doctrine. Once Reformation becomes an adjective instead of a noun and the common denominators become "Reformation history" and "Reformation doctrine," such terms suggest more unity to the Reformation than many historians find to be justified.

For the last twenty-five years, the trend has been to speak of Reformation in the plural instead of the singular. For example, historians isolate and write

about the communal reformation, the urban reformation, the people's or the princes' reformations, and the national reformations of Europe. Some scholars doubt whether these different movements had enough in common to warrant speaking of *the* Reformation of the sixteenth century. Consequently, some scholars no longer do. A recent textbook, entitled *The European Reformations*, justifies its title with the following statement: "In more recent scholarship this 'conventional sense' of the Reformation [the traditional unified view] has given way to recognition that there was a plurality of Reformations which interacted with each other: Lutheran, Catholic, Reformed, and dissident movements."¹

This plurality is the subject of debate among sixteenth-century historians on both sides of the Atlantic. Not long ago in Germany, a real debate was staged among church historians Bernd Moeller, Berndt Hamm, and Dorothea Wendebourg.² According to Wendebourg, the unity of the Reformation was first created by the verdict of the Counter-Reformation, a term still found useful by Wendebourg. She argued that the rejection of all Protestants by the Counter-Reformation made the Reformation a single phenomenon, namely, a decisive and lasting break in Western Christianity. Without that verdict, the Reformation would have remained a series of widely divergent attempts to reform the Western church. Against this argument, both Moeller and Hamm claimed that a common Protestant agenda, directed against the medieval system of works righteousness, existed prior to its rejection by the Roman Church and remained a coherent basis of the Reformation even after Reformers went their separate ways.

While I think Moeller and Hamm are correct in principle, their definition of a common agenda is too narrow to establish the unity of the Reformation in the face of current challenges. A broader definition of the Reformation's agenda is needed in order to ground both its coherence and its significance, for not only has the unity of the Reformation been challenged, but also its

¹ Carter Lindberg, *The European Reformations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 9. In the notes that follow, the following abbreviations are used: CO = *Ioannis Calvini opera quae supersunt omnia*, 59 vols. (Brunswick and Berlin: C. A. Schwetschke, 1863-1900); LW = *Luther's Works, American Edition*, 55 vols. (St. Louis and Philadelphia: Concordia and Fortress, 1955-1986); OS = *Calvini Opera Selecta*, 5 vols., rev. ed. (Munich: Christian Kaiser, 1952-1962); WA = *D. Martin Luthers Werke, Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, 60 vols. (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883-1980); WABr = *D. Martin Luthers Werke, Briefwechsel*, 17 vols. (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1930-1983); ZW = *Huldreich Zwinglis sämtliche Werke* (Leipzig: M. Heinsius Nachfolger, 1904-1990).

² *Reformationstheorien: Ein kirchenhistorischer Disput über Einheit und Vielfalt der Reformation* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995).

significance.³ In the framework of Western civilization, the designation “early modern studies” is replacing the traditional combination of Renaissance and Reformation. In the framework of church history, one can no longer take for granted the recognition of a thoroughgoing significance of the Reformation. In his rendition of Christianity in the West, John Bossy wrote: “[Reformation] may be a necessary concept in the history of the Church as an institution; but it does not seem much use in the history of Christianity, since it is too high-flown to cope with actual social behavior, and not high-flown enough to deal sensitively with thought, feeling, or culture.”⁴ Bossy’s distinction between church history and the history of Christianity is questionable and his criterion “high-flown” is ambiguous, but his main contention is clear: The term Reformation is useful for designating the restructuring of the church but inadequate for handling most everything else that Christians felt, thought, and did during the sixteenth century.

Even the Reformation as a restructuring of the Western church languishes under the assertion that Reformers did not want such a restructuring at all and that the Protestant Reformation should be understood as catholic. Scholars who argue this way emphasize that Martin Luther, John Calvin, and others did not want to start a new church but to reform the old one. A recent book by the German theologian Gunther Wenz exemplifies this claim. Wenz disavows a portrayal of the Reformation (1569) by Lukas Cranach the Younger, which shows the Reformers as workers in the vineyard of the Lord. On one side of the picture, the vineyard is flourishing under Lutheran cultivation, while on the other side, the vineyard has withered under papal devastation. For Wenz, Cranach’s picture implies the founding of a new church by the Wittenbergers. He therefore rejects it in favor of a concept of Reformation as reform of the one, holy, catholic church.⁵ I will come back to this picture and to what I think it means for the intention of the Reformers.

The Reformation also seems to be marginalized by recent arguments that medieval piety remained popular and hard to uproot in areas that officially became Protestant. A good example of this argument is the book by Eamon

³ In 1990, Hans-Christoph Rublack reminded Reformation historians that it was quite possible to interpret the course of European history without paying much attention to their favorite topic; see Rublack, “Reformation und Moderne: Soziologische, theologische und historische Ansichten,” in *The Reformation in Germany and Europe: Interpretation and Issues*, ed. Hans Guggisberg, Gottfried Krodel, and Hans Fuglister (Gütersloh: Gütersloher, 1993), 19.

⁴ John Bossy, *Christianity in the West 1400–1700* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 91.

⁵ Gunther Wenz, *Theologie der Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*, 2 vols. (Berlin & New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1996 and 1998), 1:65–6.

Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, which depicts the Reformation in England as a concerted attack upon traditional religion, his term for medieval piety, which remained vital and popular across all segments of the population.⁶ After mentioning Duffy's book, one recent reviewer of another book on medieval devotion made the following comment about the author's perspective: "His chronological parameters ironically propagate older discussions of Church history as distinct medieval and Reformation eras."⁷ In my view, the argument that it took a long time to suppress traditional Christianity, far from marginalizing the Reformation, actually gives it a sharp historical profile.⁸ However gradual it might have been, a distinct movement called the Reformation did make fundamental changes in the traditional Christianity of Europe. By the late sixteenth century, one could call not only England a Protestant country but most of northern Europe as well.

Still, to many historians, this clear-cut result is not adequate to define the Reformation or to affirm its historical importance. The reasons, I think, are confusion about the intention of the Reformation and excessive attention to its diversity.⁹ The Reformation is often evaluated as if it were a series of conflicting reform movements that ought to have advanced modern agendas such as ecumenism, social and gender equality, rationalism, or democratic government. The result of such evaluations is often disappointing, not least because the Reformation did not have these modern agendas. If, instead, we define the Reformation in its own terms and can discern in those terms a coherent movement, then we gain a more realistic appreciation of its historical significance.

In what follows, I attempt to do just that. First, I describe what I think is the common Reformation agenda. Second, I will discuss some challenges to my conception. And, finally, I want to explore what this view of the Reformation means for our assessment of its historical significance.

⁶ Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c. 1400–c. 1580* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), 2–5.

⁷ Christopher Belitto, review of R. N. Swanson, *Religion and Devotion in Europe, c. 1215–1515* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) in *Sixteenth Century Journal* 28 (1997): 893.

⁸ Even Keith Thomas, who depicted the Reformation as the eradication of magical elements in the medieval church, admitted that Protestantism in England did not win an immediate or a complete victory; *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997 [1st ed. 1971]), 70–4.

⁹ See, e.g., the conclusion of Bob Scribner, *The Reformation in National Context*, ed. Bob Scribner, Roy Porter, and Mikuláš Teich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 225: "If it is possible to summarise a movement as internationally and locally complex as the essays here have shown the Reformation to be, we must concede that diversity is a *leitmotif*."

II. THE REFORMATION AGENDA

The Reformation of the sixteenth century was the attempt by theologians, preachers, and political leaders to make European culture more Christian than it had been. It was, if you will, an attempt to reroot the faith, to rechristianize Europe. This Reformation program wielded a two-edged sword. First, the Reformers sharply denounced the traditional religion in which they were raised as something less than Christian. Indeed, Reformers often called it paganism, and sometimes, especially when they were criticizing what they rejected as the legalism of late medieval religion, they also labeled it pharisaic. Second, the Reformers cast the message of the Reformation in missionary terms. They went about their task with zeal, planting a new and truer religion and denouncing the obstacles that stood in their way. That true religion was, in their eyes, a purer form of Christianity, and its propagation led to intense polemic against non-Christians, in particular, against Jews who refused to be converted.

This twofold agenda made all the Reformers radical: they wanted to uproot the old religion and plant the new. Cranach the Younger's depiction of the Reformation as recultivating the vineyard of the Lord is a fitting portrayal of this program to rechristianize Europe. As seen by the Reformers, the medieval church had planted the faith in the soil of pagan Europe and the faith had germinated to a certain point before the field was corrupted and neglected by the bad husbandry of the papal church. Christianity had withered almost beyond recognition and now the faith, in its genuine evangelical form, had to be planted and cultivated once again. Reformers disagreed about the rate at which the new growth would appear and some of them suspected the reaper might come at any time. But whenever the harvest was gathered, they expected God would find, if not a perfect crop, a much more bountiful Christendom than ever before full of healthy vines bearing ripe fruit. Despite his own conviction that the end was near, Luther sounded like a contented vintner himself, three years before his death, as he reported on the result of Christian recultivation in Saxony: "I do not leave our churches in poor shape; they flourish in pure and sound teaching, and they grow day by day through many excellent and sincere pastors."¹⁰

When Reformers described the Christianity they attacked as pagan or idolatrous, they were not concerned about the exact nature of paganism or whether they were using the term fairly or accurately. The point was not to identify with precision a real alternative to Christianity but to emphasize that

¹⁰ Letter to Wenceslas Link (June 20, 1543), in LW 50:242; cf. WABr 10:335.14-7.

the religion they were attacking, the traditional religion of Europe in the early 1500s, was in some grave manner less than genuinely Christian. A statement by Martin Luther from the year 1522 provides a good example. Proposing that people stay away from the Lord's Supper unless they showed love for their neighbors as evidence of repentance, Luther exclaimed: "Heavens, if this idea were really put across, it would mean that where thousands come to the sacrament now, scarcely hundreds would come . . . and so we would at last become again a group of real Christians, whereas at present we are almost completely pagan and only Christian in name."¹¹

Luther's language was hyperbolic to be sure. People flocking to the sacrament were baptized believers, not pagans, and Luther would have admitted as much.¹² Luther was attacking excessive concern with the form of the sacrament without equal or greater attention to its substance and effect. This criticism indicates that he understood the religion around him not as outright paganism but as a religion that could still transmit the symbols of Christianity but did not instill the substance of the faith in many of its adherents. "Everyone wants to be called Christian," said Luther begrudgingly, "and we have to permit it; but then they do not want to exercise faith and love."¹³

Other Reformers were also convinced that medieval Europe was not Christian enough; their conviction about the shallowness of Christianity and its kinship to idolatry and paganism was expressed in vivid and telling phrases.¹⁴ Beginning with his criticism of fasting regulations in 1522, Ulrich Zwingli denounced compulsory forms of piety as human inventions that led to idolatry.¹⁵ Those who advocated iconoclasm, destroying images and the cult of the saints, also saw themselves engaged in a "war against idols." This very campaign, equating the pictures and statues of venerable Christians with idols, indicates how unchristian many Protestants thought their opponents to be.¹⁶ In Geneva itself, the use of certain saints' names, like Claude, was

¹¹ Luther, *Receiving Both Kinds in the Sacrament* (1522), in LW 36:264; cf. WA 10,2:39.6-11. The context of this remark is Luther's criticism of the decree of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) that required confession and reception of the sacrament at least once a year.

¹² Later, against the Anabaptists, Luther affirmed that he and the movement that took his name received the true forms of Christian faith through the medieval church: *Concerning Rebaptism*, in LW 40:231-2; cf. WA 26:147.13-26.

¹³ *Receiving Both Kinds*, in LW 36:264; cf. WA 10,2:39.15-7.

¹⁴ Many such statements by Luther and Calvin have been collected and analyzed by Jean Delumeau, "Les Réformateurs et la superstition," in *Un chemin d'histoire: Chrétienté et christianisation* (Paris: Fayard, 1981), 51-79.

¹⁵ Berndt Hamm, *Zwingli's Reformation der Freiheit* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1988), 5.

¹⁶ Carlos M. N. Eire, *War against the Idols: The Reformation of Worship from Erasmus to Calvin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986). For a refined interpretation of this

prohibited at baptisms because they were the “names of idols.”¹⁷ Describing the death of Madame de Normandie in 1549, Calvin reported that this pious woman, on the day before her death, exhorted her attendant never to return to the place where he had polluted himself with idolatry [the Roman Church] but instead to lead a holy life in the Christian [!] church to which he had been led by God.¹⁸

How is it possible that Protestant Reformers believed their culture was not Christian enough, practicing idolatry in ways that were not far from paganism? After all, research has long since established that large numbers of late medieval people were enthusiastic about religion.¹⁹ The obvious answer, suggested by historians, is that religious enthusiasm did not necessarily entail intentional commitments to the faith in its orthodox form.²⁰ John Van Engen argues that the Middle Ages were certainly Christian in the sense of a dominant cultic practice. People who lived in Christian parishes understood time, space, and ritual observance essentially in terms of the Christian liturgical year, but beyond those forms it is difficult to ascertain the exact nature of people’s beliefs.²¹ Sixteenth-century Reformers, however, did make judgments about the authenticity of Christian belief, and they based those judgments on the piety around them. In their view, Christian cultic practice—such as privately endowed masses, compulsory fasting, or veneration of the saints—was itself at fault for the slide into idolatry and paganism. Reformers thought that much of what passed for Christian piety was not

attack as the desire for a truer Christian community that expressed love for the poor, see Lee Palmer Wandel, “The Reform of the Images: New Visualizations of the Christian Community at Zürich,” *Archive for Reformation History* 80 (1989): 105–24.

¹⁷ CO 10, 1:49–50 (1546). Commenting in 1550 on the community of Christians portrayed in Acts 4:32–37, Calvin wrote: “If we compare our situation with what has been told by St. Luke, we will see how far we are from Christianity”; *Sermones in Acta Apostolorum*, in *Supplementa Calviniana*, vol. 8 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1994), 116.3–4.

¹⁸ Calvin, Letter to Madame de Cany (April 29, 1549), in CO 13:246. Thanks to Austra Reinis, Princeton Seminary doctoral student, for alerting me to this text. Examination of local Calvinist communities in France led Raymond Mentzer to remark that “Calvin and his followers even linked ‘papist superstition and idolatry’ to paganism, Satanism, and the demonic”; Mentzer, “The Persistence of ‘Superstition and Idolatry’ among Rural French Calvinists,” *Church History* 65:2 (1996): 220.

¹⁹ See Bernd Moeller, “Piety in Germany around 1500,” in *The Reformation in Medieval Perspective*, ed. Steven Ozment (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1971), 50–75; see also Steven Ozment, *The Reformation in the Cities* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1975), 15–22.

²⁰ Instead of calling the late Middle Ages Christian therefore, Hartmut Boockmann believes it is more accurate to call them churchly; *Einführung in die Geschichte des Mittelalters*, 6th ed. (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1996), 118.

²¹ John Van Engen, “The Christian Middle Ages as an Historiographical Problem,” *American Historical Review* 91 (1986): 519–52.

Christian. They were convinced that a new planting of the faith was necessary.

Consequently, the Reformation also understood itself as a missionary movement. Once he was seized by a sense of urgency, Luther chose the apostolic mission recounted in Acts as an early Christian paradigm for the Wittenberg movement. From his exile at the Wartburg castle in 1521, Luther wrote to Philip Melanchthon, comparing Wittenberg to Antioch, and his colleagues to early Christian missionaries: "You lecture, Amsdorf lectures; Jonas will lecture; do you want the kingdom of God to be proclaimed only in your town? Do not others also need the gospel? Will your Antioch not release a Silas or a Paul or a Barnabas for some other work of the Spirit?"²² And not only Luther thought this way. As Bernd Moeller found, the earliest Reformation pamphleteers addressed the towns in which they had formerly served exactly as the apostle Paul had addressed his epistles.²³ These preachers echoed Luther's notion of the 1520s as a *kairos* for the rebirth of Christianity; he described this *kairos* as the coming of the gospel to Germany like a passing shower of rain that would not return where it once had been.²⁴

This missionary awareness shaped much of Reformation theology, giving it a more Christocentric focus than one might expect for a culture already christianized. According to the Reformers, late medieval piety smacked of paganism and idolatry not just because superstition and magic were present, but because the church had failed to uphold Christ as the exclusive object of veneration. Rerooting Christianity, therefore, required the recovery of the teaching and work of Jesus that was often abbreviated in phrases such as preaching the gospel or justification by faith. For Luther and his followers, justification by faith was biblical code language for "salvation for the sake of Christ alone." Zwingli's definition of the gospel was that "sins are remitted in the name of Christ, and no heart," he said, "ever received tidings more glad."²⁵ For Calvin, scripture teaches that "Christ, through whom we return into favor with God, has been set before us as an example, whose pattern we ought to express in our life."²⁶ Reformers certainly differed on how it was best

²² Letter to Melanchthon (July 13, 1521), in LW 48:262; cf. WABr 2:359.112-5.

²³ Bernd Moeller, "Was wurde in der Frühzeit der Reformation in den deutschen Städten gepredigt?" *Archive for Reformation History* 75 (1984): 176-93, specifically 185.

²⁴ Moeller, "Was wurde . . . gepredigt?" 184. Luther's observation was made in his 1524 plea for Christian schools addressed to the city councils of Germany, in LW 40:55; cf. WA 15:32.1-14.

²⁵ *Commentary on True and False Religion*, ed. Samuel Macauley Jackson (Durham, NC: Labyrinth, 1981), 119; cf. ZW 3:691.33-5.

²⁶ *Institutes of the Christian Religion* III.6.3, ed. John T. McNeill and trans. Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols., Library of Christian Classics, vols. 20-21 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), 20:686; cf. OS 4:148.21-3.

done, but they were united, even most of the radicals, in the conviction that Jesus had to be urgently held up as the way of salvation.

Like most theses, my argument for rechristianization as the agenda of the Reformation is not completely original. I began to think about it seriously in 1994 as I was preparing to teach a course on the Reformation. As I reread treatises of Luther, I observed something simple that had never struck me before: I noticed how often Luther used the word Christian and how he repeatedly called upon his readers and hearers to act in a specifically Christian way. On the one hand, what else should one expect from a Christian Reformer? But, on the other, why would a Reformer harp on the need to act like a true Christian if that Reformer already lived in Christian culture that he generally endorsed? Suddenly, it dawned on me that Luther did not accept his context as authentically Christian with only minor deformities, otherwise he would not allude to baptized people as pagan or exclaim in 1521 that there was more idolatry in the world than ever before.²⁷ Instead, like the portrayal of Reformers in the vineyard, once the evangelical movement was underway, he and other Reformers set out to overhaul the piety of their time.

I was certainly helped to this insight by the work of the French historian Jean Delumeau, whose book on the Catholic Reformation as a process of christianization was published in 1971.²⁸ For Delumeau, the Catholic Reformation attempted to bring, for the first time, genuine Christianity to rural France. What the rural missionaries found, according to Delumeau, was that "the intellectual and psychological climate of the people was characterized by a profound unfamiliarity with the basics of Christianity, and by a persistent pagan mentality with the occasional vestiges of pre-Christian ceremonial."²⁹ Catholic missionaries, therefore, relied on better trained clergy who no longer identified closely with the populace to teach orthodox Christianity for the first time.

In 1971, Delumeau had also included the Protestant Reformation in his thesis: "... the two Reformations, Luther's and Rome's, were two processes, which apparently competed but which in fact converged, by which the masses were christianized and religion spiritualized."³⁰ Delumeau did not develop his

²⁷ Luther expresses this fear in the context of criticizing people who approached Mary for help as if she were divine; *The Magnificat*, in LW 21:323-4; cf. WA 7:570.5-7.

²⁸ Jean Delumeau, *Le Catholicisme entre Luther et Voltaire* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1971); English translation: *Catholicism between Luther and Voltaire* (London: Burns and Oates; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977); 6th French ed., with Monique Cottret, *Le Catholicisme entre Luther et Voltaire* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1996).

²⁹ Delumeau, *Catholicism between Luther and Voltaire*, 176.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 161.

thesis for the Protestant Reformation; nor, as far as I know, have any other historians. To do that, some adaptations have to be made. Protestant Reformers were not bringing orthodox Christianity into areas where it had scarcely existed before. Instead, they were treating the towns and the countryside, which were surely Christian by the standard of Van Engen, as if they were scarcely better than pagan. They were not christianizing but rechristianizing the culture, not planting the faith for the first time but rerooting it. Nevertheless, Delumeau's thesis strikes me as useful because it describes generally what Protestant as well as Catholic Reformers wanted to accomplish.

III. CHALLENGING A COMMON AGENDA

Given all the disagreements that emerged among Protestants as well as the disputes that continued between Protestants and Catholics, is it possible to speak meaningfully of one Reformation with a common agenda? I believe one can do this if the agenda—rerooting the faith in Europe—is seen as the common goal of the Reformation and the disagreements are understood to be different conceptions of how this rerooting could best be accomplished. Protestants and Catholics agreed that the abuses of medieval piety should be abolished, but they disagreed, as did Protestants among themselves, about the extent of that abolition. In order to make this argument, however, some issues and traditional ideas about the Reformation have to be reformulated.

First, Martin Luther's own vision of reform has to be reconceived as the creation of a more truly Christian society. The tendency to identify Luther's reform as secular can be traced to a misunderstanding of his model of two kingdoms. Because Luther affirmed a divinely authorized temporal kingdom alongside the spiritual kingdom of Christ, some interpreters argue that Luther replaced an intensely religious piety with a more secular piety in which people concentrated on their daily life and occupation. Luther did indeed want to replace a misguided religious piety with a new way of being Christian, but that did not mean the new piety was less Christian or more worldly. Luther never says that Christians belong to the world to the same degree they belong to the spiritual kingdom. Instead, he says true Christians, who strive to live by the Sermon on the Mount, belong to the spiritual kingdom without having to withdraw from the world.³¹ Believers should consider their daily life and calling holy in God's eyes, and they should exercise that calling in Christian faith and in love directed toward others.

³¹ Luther, *Temporal Authority* (1523), in LW 45:87–93; cf. WA 11:248.32–253.16.

In his treatise on Christian freedom, Luther sketches the portrait of these believers alongside a resounding lament over the demise of Christian faith and life in late medieval Europe. That lament is set against the “glory of the Christian life” that Luther wants his society to recover:

Who then can comprehend the riches and glory of the Christian life? It can do all things and has all things and lacks nothing. It is lord over sin, death, and hell, and yet at the same time it serves, ministers to, and benefits everyone. But alas in our day this life is unknown throughout the world; it is neither preached about nor sought after; we are altogether ignorant of our own name and do not know why we are Christian or bear the name of Christians. Surely we are named after Christ, not because he is absent from us, but because we believe in him and are Christs one to another and do to our neighbors as Christ does to us.³²

At the heart of Luther’s vision is the recovery of a religion that will mark his society with a vigorous Christ-centered piety.

Second, this vision is fundamentally the same as that held by those well-known architects of the Christian city: Ulrich Zwingli (Zürich), Martin Bucer (Strasbourg), and John Calvin (Geneva). The issues that divided them from Luther have to be understood as differences in strategy and not as competing interpretations of Christianity.

Between Zwingli and Luther, the most critical difference concerned the theory of how Christ was present in the Lord’s Supper. Most interpretations make this difference a theological one and base it either on their prior education or on their Christologies. Theological differences were certainly elaborated, but I think the basic motivation underlying these differences was a common one: having rejected the sacrifice of the mass as idolatrous, both Reformers were trying to position Christ, in a nonidolatrous way, at the center of eucharistic piety. Zwingli refused to accept a bodily presence of Christ in the elements because he was afraid it supported the traditional false piety that led people to venerate material objects: “We worship with embraces and kisses wood, stones, earth, dust, shoes, vestments, rings, hats, swords, belts. . . .”³³ Instead, Zwingli wanted to focus the gaze of the eucharistic community on the cross as the genuine source of redemption and as the object of remembrance and thanksgiving.³⁴ Luther fiercely defended a bodily

³² LW 31:368; cf. WA 7:66.29–36.

³³ *True and False Religion*, 199; cf. ZW 3:774.32–775.1.

³⁴ *On the Lord’s Supper* (1526), in *Zwingli and Bullinger*, trans. G. W. Bromiley, Library of Christian Classics, vol. 24 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1953), 234: “. . . [Christ] himself instituted a remembrance of that deliverance by which he redeemed the whole world, that

presence in the Supper, not because he was medieval or a strict literalist, but because he believed that the sacrament mediated forgiveness most concretely by bringing the believer into direct contact with both natures of Christ. Both Reformers wanted to avoid idolatry; they disagreed on which theology and practice of the Lord's Supper placed Christ most effectively at the center of the meal.

Heiko Oberman has argued that Calvin's agenda for the Reformation was different from that of city Reformers such as Zwingli and Bucer, but I believe it was a difference of scope and not of substance. According to Oberman, Calvin's target was the reform of Europe and not just of Geneva, and his reformation is best described as a reformation of refugees, namely, of Protestants from France and other countries who found refuge in Geneva but whose mission was to return true Christianity to France and to the rest of Europe.³⁵ Frankly, I do not see any substantial difference between this program and the agendas of Zwingli and Bucer or, for that matter, of Luther. Calvin's targeted area was larger: he wanted to convert large Catholic areas like France, and his followers wanted to improve the Lutheran Reformation in some places that had already become Protestant. We should recall, however, that Bucer's vision of the limits of the kingdom of Christ expanded considerably when he moved from Strasbourg to England,³⁶ and Luther's own reformation horizon extended well beyond Germany. Calvin began his work later in the process of rechristianization. His mentality remained a missionary one—to make Geneva, France, and the rest of Europe more Christian than they had been.

Third, the line between the magisterial and the Radical Reformation has to be drawn less boldly. The vision of a renewed Christian culture also inspired the Radical Reformation. The radicals have so often been cast in the role of

we might never forget that for our sakes he exposed his body to the ignominy of death, and not merely that we might not forget it in our hearts, but that we might publicly attest it with praise and thanksgiving, joining together for the greater magnifying and proclaiming of the matter in the eating and drinking of the sacrament of his sacred passion, which is a representation of Christ's giving of his body and shedding of his blood for our sakes." Cf. ZW 4:857.17–858.1.

³⁵ Oberman, "*Europa afflicta*: The Reformation of the Refugees," *Archive for Reformation History* 83 (1992): 91–111. Calvin's lectures on particular prophetic books between 1557 and 1564, which were heard by a number of future preachers in France, express fully his theology of mission and of the kingdom of Christ. See Peter Wilcox, "The Lectures of John Calvin and the Nature of his Audience, 1555–1564," *Archive for Reformation History* 87 (1996): 136–48.

³⁶ Martin Bucer, *De Regno Christi* (1550), I, preface, in *Melanchthon and Bucer*, ed. Wilhelm Pauck, Library of Christian Classics, vol. 19 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969), 175–6; cf. *Martini Buceri opera latina*, vol. 15 (1 & 2), ed. François Wendel (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France; Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1955), 15.1: 2–3.

separatists and spiritualists that a common vision is hard to discern.³⁷ The following words of Menno Simons, however, could be taken straight from the works of Martin Luther: "Not all are Christians of whom it is boasted. But those who have the Spirit of Christ are true Christians, though I do not know where one might find very many."³⁸ There were differences, to be sure, not the least of which was the rejection of infant baptism. Even that rejection was made necessary, in radical eyes, because the agenda of rerooting genuine Christianity, which they shared with mainline reformers, was impossible to accomplish so long as infants, without explicit biblical warrant, were being routinely baptized.

The best common denominator of all radicals was their claim to produce a Christianity superior to that of both Catholics and Protestants. The radical element in these movements was not simply their refusal to obey civil authority or their rebellion against it, but their determination to infuse their communities with a more authentic Christianity than most civil and religious authorities could tolerate. Whether bringing in this superior Christianity by force or waiting for it patiently in covert conventicles, the radicals thought they were rerooting it even if the growing season was short. Hans Hut, one of those who expected only a few to be saved, said that faith had to precede baptism because "this order must be maintained if a true Christendom is to be established, even if the whole world is destroyed because of it."³⁹

Fourth, the Catholic Reformation also participated in this general Reformation program of trying to rechristianize Europe. The aim of deepening the faith was at work not only in rural France but also in those efforts that have been regarded as primarily defensive. The Society of Jesus offers a good example. John O'Malley has proposed two terms to capture the essence of their mission: *reformatio* and *christianitas*. The first term describes the process of conversion, a change of heart that the Jesuits regarded as the object of their

³⁷ Hans-Jürgen Goertz has argued that the number of so-called Radical Reformers, such as the Hutterites, who attempted to implant their movements with the help of civil authorities, belies the meaning of radical as separatist; *Religiöse Bewegungen in der frühen Neuzeit* (München: R. Oldenbourg, 1993), 62–3.

³⁸ "Foundation of Christian Doctrine," in *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons c. 1496–1561*, ed. J. C. Wenger and trans. Leonard Verduin (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1956), 121. Other Reformers would also have agreed with Menno's indictment of medieval piety as "consisting only in an outward appearance and human righteousness, such as hypocritical fastings, pilgrimages, praying and reading lots of Pater Nosters and Ave Marias, hearing frequent masses, going to confessionals and like hypocrisies" (p. 111).

³⁹ Hans Hut, "On the Mystery of Baptism (1527)," in *The Radical Reformation*, ed. Michael G. Baylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 156. See Gottfried Seebass, "Das Zeichen der Erwählten: Zum Verständnis der Taufe bei Hans Hut," in *Die Reformation und die Aussenseiter: Gesammelte Aufsätze und Vorträge*, ed. Irene Dingel (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997), 203–6.

teaching. The second term (*christianitas*) describes the goal of that conversion: the making of a Christian that consisted of "introducing the individual to the essential and traditional practices of the Christian religion and to the social responsibilities and opportunities of the believer especially through the spiritual and corporal works of mercy."⁴⁰ The linkage of *reformatio* and *christianitas* informed Jesuit ministry at home as well as abroad;⁴¹ consequently, their ministry at home was an intensive form of missionary work in which the Society of Jesus attempted to plant a deeper Christianity in Europe. If O'Malley is right, the agenda of the Jesuits was quite similar to that of Protestant and radical movements—to make their culture more Christian.

Still, one important difference should be noted. Instead of abolishing the traditional piety, the Catholic Reformation left much more of it intact than Protestants and radicals did. The *Spiritual Exercises* contain a forceful reassertion of late medieval piety; among other things, they uphold prayer to the saints and the veneration of their relics, pilgrimages, indulgences for jubilees and crusades, and precepts of fasting and abstinence.⁴² Teaching Christianity was obviously not held to be incompatible with this traditional piety.⁴³ Catholic Reformers did not, however, consider the practice of traditional piety business as usual but tried to focus it on the essence of Christianity. The Council of Trent, for example, vigorously denied that veneration of the saints amounted to idolatry or that it was inconsistent with the honor of Christ as sole mediator.⁴⁴

Fifth, what about the lasting structural differences that did emerge among Christian groups? Intended or not, new forms of Christianity did come into being as a result of the Reformation; in recent years they have been studied more intensively than ever under the rubric of confessionalization.⁴⁵ Surely

⁴⁰ John W. O'Malley, "Was Ignatius Loyola a Church Reformer? How to Look at Early Modern Catholicism," in *Religious Culture in the Sixteenth Century: Preaching, Rhetoric, Spirituality, and Reform* (Aldershot & Brookfield, VT: Variorum/Ashgate, 1993), XII, 182.

⁴¹ Ibid., 185–9; cf. O'Malley, *The First Jesuits* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 84–90, 115–27.

⁴² *Ignatius of Loyola: The Spiritual Exercises and Selected Works*, ed. George E. Ganss, S. J. (New York: Paulist, 1991), 211–2; O'Malley, *The First Jesuits*, 49–50, 264–72.

⁴³ Plantings of the cross that became popular in the seventeenth century raised Christ to the center of devotion, but they could also become objects of veneration and superstition; Louis Chatellier, *The Religion of the Poor: Rural Missions in Europe and the Formation of Modern Catholicism, c. 1500–c. 1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 108–30.

⁴⁴ Session XXV: On the Invocation, Veneration, and Relics of Saints, and on Sacred Images, in *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, ed. H. J. Schroeder (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1955), 215, 483.

⁴⁵ Heinz Schilling, "Confessional Europe," in *Handbook of European History 1400–1600: Late Middle Ages, Renaissance, and Reformation*, ed. Thomas A. Brady Jr., Heiko A. Oberman, James D. Tracy, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 2:641–81; cf. Schilling, "Die

this diverse confessional outcome challenges my assertion that the Reformation was a coherent sixteenth-century movement to rechristianize Europe.⁴⁶ In my opinion, however, the rise of different confessions was not a decline from the original vision of the Reformation but the structural outcome of that intention that anchored new ways of being Christian in the culture. The faith could only be rerooted, it turned out, in diverse patterns of theology and piety and in different sociopolitical contexts that we call the confessional groupings of early modern Europe. They become the forms in which that rerooting of the faith was preserved for generations and even centuries to come.

Sixth, let us consider a final challenge. Even if the Reformation had a common agenda of rerooting the faith, it failed, either because a process of secularization set in,⁴⁷ or because magic and superstition continued to be widespread in post-Reformation Europe. The argument for secularization goes something like this: The Reformation showered Europe with a new kind of Christianity, namely Protestantism, which spiritualized religion and made it congruous with secular forces such as the rise of capitalism and the autonomy of the territorial state. The persistence of magic and superstition challenges the depth of secularization, but it implies that the campaign to reroot a more authentic Christian faith was also a failure. Bob Scribner argued that the Protestant Reformation by no means led to a "disenchantment of the world," as Max Weber claimed, but shared with the Catholic Reformation a sacred view of the universe.⁴⁸ If this sacred view and the superstition it supported are included in a fuller portrayal of Protestantism, then the Reformation, he argued, would look much less like the beginning of the

Konfessionalisierung von Kirche, Staat und Gesellschaft—Profil, Leistung, Defizite und Perspektiven eines geschichtswissenschaftlichen Paradigmas," in *Die katholische Konfessionalisierung*, ed. Wolfgang Reinhard and Heinz Schilling (Gütersloh: Gütersloher, 1995), 1–49.

⁴⁶ The bibliography of confessionalization in Germany now includes separate volumes on each of the major groups: *Die reformierte Konfessionalisierung in Deutschland—Das Problem der "Zweiten Reformation,"* ed. Heinz Schilling; *Die lutherische Konfessionalisierung in Deutschland*, ed. Hans-Christoph Rublack; *Die katholische Konfessionalisierung*, ed. Wolfgang Reinhard and Heinz Schilling. All three volumes originated in symposia and appeared in the series *Schriften des Vereins für Reformationsgeschichte* (vols. 195, 197, 198) published by Gütersloher Verlagshaus in Gütersloh, 1986, 1992, and 1995.

⁴⁷ A mild version of this view was offered by James Hastings Nichols, *History of Christianity 1650–1950: Secularization of the West* (New York: Ronald Press, 1956), 460: "The modern Christian churches inherited the great new enterprise of medieval and Reformation Christianity, the endeavor to penetrate and 'Christianize' civilization. For three hundred years they continued this attempt, yet, on the whole, with ever less success."

⁴⁸ Robert W. Scribner, "The Reformation, Popular Magic, and the 'Disenchantment of the World,'" *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 23 (1993): 475–94.

modern world. In the opinion of other historians such as Gerald Strauss, superstitious Protestants also looked a lot less like the devoutly orthodox Christians envisioned by the Reformers.⁴⁹

As a process of rechristianization, however, the European Reformation should not be judged on grounds that the persistence of popular beliefs prevented a more rational culture from emerging, but on the extent to which it prevented popular Christianity, in the face of secularizing forces, from degenerating into the magic and superstition of pre-Christian religion.⁵⁰ In its confessionalized outcome, the Reformation did put in place forms of Christianity that replanted historically orthodox teaching, worship, and piety in regional subcultures of Europe. These confessions had little if any sense of introducing a more secular modern world, although they certainly tried to reduce superstition even as they participated in the rebirth of learning that swept across Europe. During and after the Reformation, European society was still Christendom, a civil society that publicly privileged Christianity as the true faith. That did not change until the eighteenth century, when explicit Christian content began to lose public stature and to be privatized.⁵¹ Confessional Christianity planted by the Reformation, however, survived both the demise of Christendom and the tenacity of superstition.

IV. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE REFORMATION AGENDA

Even if the challenges to a common agenda can be countered, the question remains: What is the significance of treating Reformation history and doctrine as a coherent phenomenon and of representing it in a chair with this title?

First, it has historical significance. The perspective of a common agenda enables us to place the Reformation meaningfully and appropriately in the story of Christianity at large. Christianity is a historical religion wedded to no particular culture. It has to be rooted and rerooted in every society it enters. In fundamental continuity with the agenda of the medieval church, the Reformation was the widespread sixteenth-century attempt to reroot Christian faith in European culture so that it would thrive in continuity with its earliest standards. Using this criterion, we can say without exaggeration that the

⁴⁹ Gerald Strauss, *Luther's House of Learning: Indoctrination of the Young in the German Reformation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 307.

⁵⁰ According to Patrick Collinson, one can also imagine the Reformation to be an "episode of re-Christianization or even primary Christianization" which decelerated or arrested "a process of secularization with much deeper roots"; *The Religion of Protestants: The Church in English Society 1559-1625* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982), 199.

⁵¹ Rublack, "Reformation und Moderne," 32-3.

Reformation made a significant imprint on Christianity in Europe: Christian belief and practice, in historically based orthodox forms, persisted and even flourished in the confessional cultures that dominated early modern Europe. Renewal movements that came after the Reformation, such as pietism, Methodist reform, and evangelicalism, had essentially the same agenda and retain their prominent place in the story of Christianity.

Second, the Reformation agenda has social significance. It was a public and political attempt to apply Christianity more effectively to social institutions. Consider, for example, the institution of marriage. Protestant Reformers advocated important changes that are still with us and still under discussion: the necessity of public consent and ceremony, the rejection of compulsory clerical celibacy, and the allowance of divorce under certain conditions. Because they desacramentalized marriage, however, it would be a mistake to argue that Protestants wanted to secularize it. Even Luther, who called marriage "an outward, bodily thing," devoted most of his treatise on married life to a discussion of how a Christian should live in marriage, especially in a time when, in his words, "many pagan books . . . treat of nothing but the depravity of womankind and the unhappiness of marriage."⁵²

Third, focusing on a common agenda has significance for the history of doctrine. The theological significance of the Reformation should be sought both in its confessional diversity and in its common vision. The first is easier to do than the second. Histories of doctrine tend to be descriptive and to focus on the differences between confessions. Can a history of Reformation doctrine be written that is more than a description of differences? I believe it can, especially if a common vision of rerooting the faith is taken as a starting point and the Reformation is seen as the recovery, within a trinitarian framework, of a Christocentric focus for faith and piety. To be true to the Reformation as a whole, this Christocentric focus cannot be limited to the second article of the Creed but has to extend to, and be complemented by, the third article of the Creed where most theological debates themselves were lodged. Why was that? Because the Reformation agenda sought not only to reaffirm Christ as the center of redemption but to reshape faith, community, worship, and piety around that center through the instrumental presence of the Holy Spirit.

Fourth, the Reformation agenda has ecumenical significance both for interconfessional and for interreligious dialogue. The first has made great strides and we are the beneficiaries of it, but I wonder how much farther we

⁵² Luther, *The Estate of Marriage* (1522), in LW 45:25 and 36; cf. WA 10/2:283,8–9; 10/2:292.22–6.

could go if partners in dialogue would view the sixteenth-century confessional churches as partners in a common mission instead of as rival structures with competing claims to truth and to antiquity? Suppose radical traditions were not seen as stepchildren of the Reformation on the fringe of the Christian family but as full-blooded brothers and sisters in a common endeavor to recover the family's roots.

The Reformation can contribute more to interreligious dialogue than first meets the eye; the contacts between Christianity and Judaism and the comments by Reformers on Islam were by no means all negative. Nevertheless, the Reformation agenda teaches all those who would use such resources a crucial lesson in humility. The Reformation arose in a culture that was already restricting and expelling Jews, and both Catholic and Protestant Reformers—Martin Luther is a notorious example but not the only one—eventually assumed a hostile stance toward contemporary Judaism. This hostility was exacerbated by the Reformation campaign to make Europe more Christian and by the disappointment of evangelical hopes that Jews would convert in large numbers to the faith. This dose of historical reality is a caution against triumphalism and demonstrates that the Reformation not only had a common vision but also entailed a common burden.

Finally, as a crucial chapter in the christianization of Europe, the Reformation still has significance for Christianity around the world. Reservations that historians have about the impact of the Reformation often betray a eurocentric or a Western narrowness. In fact, the Reformation has an extra-European history; it went around the world with European culture as its host. Where the latter was planted, Christianity in one or more of its Reformation forms was often planted as well, and, in hindsight, that transplantation was not always benign. Some of those forms, connected to colonial hegemony, have withered and others may follow suit, but rerooting the faith continues. Can we identify other cultures in which the faith is being rerooted in circumstances similar to those of early Reformation Europe? Perhaps the Reformation can serve worldwide Christianity, not so much by preserving its European forms, but by fostering impulses to reroot the faith in culturally appropriate forms that also embrace dialogue with the traditional religions of those cultures.

Insofar as that happens, the vision of sixteenth-century Reformers will be honored, since it will not be Reformation diversity itself that is replanted, but a deeper, more genuine, and more vibrant Christianity, which was the common goal of the Reformation itself.

Olov Hartman: “Words about Words about Words . . .”

by G. ROBERT JACKS

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THE WORDS OF THE TITLE WERE SPOKEN by Olov Hartman. Only they were spoken in Swedish: “Ord om ord om ord . . .”¹ And they referred to what goes on in most church worship services today—especially in our preaching. Words about words about words. A similar conviction was spoken by “Meshach,” a character in Hartman’s drama *The Fiery Furnace* (*Den brinnande ugnen*): “Church was words about words about words, a ghost-world of slaughtered truths.”² It was not just that Olov was outspoken about matters such as “The Ten Greatest Things Wrong with the Church.” He was that. But he also had a better idea, an idea God had had first. When God wanted to send a message of Love to his people, he didn’t, ultimately, use words. He had sent words on the lips of prophets and the prayers of a people. But we had received them largely as words about words. Words by themselves would never do the job—not faxes, not e-mail, not even priority mail.

Eliza Doolittle had the same idea in the musical *My Fair Lady*: “Words, words, words, I’m so sick of words. . . . Don’t talk at all—*show me now!*” God goes beyond words. He sends his Son. Not words. Incarnation. That is God’s bottom line. And it was Olov Hartman’s theological bottom line too. Do not just say the words: show and tell. One way of doing this would be through the use of *drama*. Yes, drama, from the Greek *dran*—“do, act.” Take seriously what it means to “be doers of the word.”³

¹ Comments attributed to Olov Hartman are from tape-recorded interviews with him during the summer of 1970.

² “. . . Kyrkan var ord om ord om ord, en spökvärld av dräpta sanningar.” In *Den brinnande ugnen* (Stockholm: Rabén & Sjögren, 1958), 44.

³ See James 1:22.

I. OLOV HARTMAN

It is quite possible that few in this country, aside, perhaps, from some good Swedish Lutherans, have ever heard of Olov Hartman. I had not, until 1966, when I met him and his *regissör* Tuve Nyström at a religious drama conference in Lake Forest, Illinois. From the time I first came to know him, Olov and Tuve were a team—Olov writing the plays and Tuve directing them. They were a highly creative team, like twin potters working to shape the same piece of clay into a work of art.

At the time I met him, Olov was director of *Sigtunastiftelsen*, the Sigtuna Foundation, a center for church and culture located in the town of Sigtuna, a stone's throw from the beautiful Lake Mälaren. Later in the sixties, when it came time for me to choose a dissertation topic for my Ph.D. at Columbia, Olov Hartman and his *kyrkospel* (liturgical dramas; literally, church dramas) came to mind. I had two degrees in theology and my studies were now in speech and theater. I wanted some way to bring the two disciplines together. So, I wrote to Herr Hartman ("Please, call me Olov!") and asked for his suggestions. Having had a Swedish grandmother, I was more than willing to learn Swedish. He wrote back offering me the opportunity to translate four of his plays that had never been translated into English. (When I later saw him in person, he handed me a fifth, saying, "Here! I forgot this one!") He invited me to come and live at *Sigtunastiftelsen* during the summer of 1970, where we could work together. At that point, I began a most wonderful journey learning more about Olov Hartman, the man, his mind, and his methods. We met each weekday for about twelve weeks, discussing his plays and their theology and symbolism.

I realize that referring to someone as a "Renaissance man" is to suggest that person has mastered all sorts of disciplines, published tons of tomes, and leaped tall buildings at a single bound. "Renaissance man" only comes close to describing Olov Hartman. He was a priest in the Church of Sweden, prolific author of novels and essays, theological scholar, gifted musician, and one of Sweden's foremost intellectual leaders, with especially strong influence in matters dealing with Christianity.

He was born in 1906 in Stockholm. His parents Carl and Anna Hartman were active in the Salvation Army, but Olov, having once trained as a Salvation Army cadet, decided to become a priest in the Church of Sweden. After studying at the *Fjällstedska* School in Uppsala, he was ordained to the ministry in 1932. He became a curate in a church in Växjö and later a rector in Nässjö. In 1948, he was offered the post of director of *Sigtunastiftelsen*, and served there until his retirement in 1970.

Sigtuna, which lies between Stockholm and Uppsala, is one of the oldest cities of Sweden and its first Christian capital. There, beginning in 1948, Hartman had brought authors and artists of all sorts together for annual artists' conferences. This was a period of rapid church growth in Sweden, and Hartman was seeking to involve artists in fellowship and discussion exploring ways in which the arts could enrich the life and worship of the church. Hartman would eventually emerge as one of his country's foremost church artists, contributing vastly to the role of the arts in a time of liturgical renewal that would strengthen the voice of the church within a secularized society. It all began when someone asked Olov Hartman to write a "Sigtuna play." It was the early 1950s, and Sweden's cultural interests were especially directed towards stage art. Many cities staged plays. A *ruinspel* was staged on the ruins in Visby, and another ruins play in Borgholm. Varberg had its fortress play, Nydala its cloister play, Leksand its heaven play, and Laholm its Lagaholm play. Chronicle plays were being presented at Nyköpingshus, Söderfors Mill, and Bångbro. Of the new phenomenon, one drama critic wrote:

The Swedish tourist industry and Swedish drama have in recent years found each other in a remarkable sworn brotherhood whose slogan is open-air theatre. Each city its own little ruin or amphitheatre, each hill its own play. If all goes well, the Tourist Association and the Drama Society could merge for next summer. This is surely profitable for tourism. Whether the phenomenon is as profitable for drama, however, is questionable.⁴

II. THE START OF SOMETHING SIGNIFICANT

Sigtuna, reportedly founded near the end of the tenth century by Olov Skötkonung, the first Christian king of Sweden, was a historically significant city. Now, if it only had its "Sigtuna play," it could become the next Swedish Oberammergau. Author Harriet Hjorth Wetterström took the initiative. Olov Hartman was asked to write the play and Tuve Nyström, a teacher at the Sigtuna school, was recruited as director. The result, Hartman's first drama, was *The Holy City* (*Den heliga staden*).

The site for the drama was the outdoor "chapel" at *Sigtunastiftelsen* surrounded by romantic arcades and a rose garden. One could glance off to the right and see the lush bay where missionaries and vikings once landed. There, Sigtuna of 1020 would live again. In time, nearly half of the town's population was involved in the drama—acting, directing, or sewing costumes.

⁴ Mauritz Edström, "Symboler i Sigtuna," *Dagstidningen Arbetaren* (Stockholm), July 20, 1953.

The city itself contributed a subsidy of one crown per resident (a total of two thousand crowns) towards the community effort. It had its premier on July 18, 1953, ran for two summers, and was hailed with hopes that it might become a summer tradition.

A tradition did develop, but it was not a simple summer-theater tradition. In *The Holy City*, Hartman had woven richly textured theological themes, creating an intricate drama of no little substance. It earned him comparisons with August Strindberg, Kaj Munk, T. S. Eliot, and Graham Greene. Ebbe Linde, a writer for *Dagens Nyheter*, was one who saw the wider ramifications of this theological drama. At the end of a review of the premier performance, Linde wrote: "In any case, it was a beginning, and if one could eventually evolve a Swedish church-drama tradition in a class with, say, the English, then it certainly would be welcome, even among heathens."⁵ Linde's comment was something of a prophecy. *The Holy City* was the first of over a dozen dramas that would establish Olov Hartman as the central figure and Sigtuna as the central locale of a church-drama movement that for more than two decades would embrace Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and Finland, and eventually make itself known throughout the world. It was also the beginning of a strong and productive collaboration between two artists: Hartman the author and Nyström the director.

One significant aspect of the first Hartman-Nyström drama was particularly important for the church-drama movement that was to come: the use of liturgical elements. Hartman explained, "As a priest, I am living in liturgy and breathing in it from morning to evening—so I never can quite personally leave it out. But in this play there were some practical questions which couldn't be solved without liturgy." The "stage" for *The Holy City*, *Sigtunastiftelsen's* open-air church, offered no possibilities for using a curtain to define acts. To solve this problem, Hartman wrote in "liturgical moments" in which the choruses would gather at the altar to chant antiphonal psalms. The effect was a pause in the movement of dramatic action, a moment of stillness. Then the action would resume once again. A snippet of the liturgy in which Hartman "lived and breathed" was thus used purely as a dramatic device here. But the ultimate effect was far greater than just a "dramatic device."

As the actors rehearsed the drama, they began to realize they were not in an ordinary theatre situation with performance and critics, desiring success and an audience's applause. Somehow, the liturgical focus upon the altar made things different. Hartman said:

⁵ Ebbe Linde, "Den heliga staden i Sigtuna," *Dagens Nyheter* (Stockholm), July 19, 1953.

I remember that Tuve Nyström—although at that time he was an agnostic—and the players from different parts of the theatre world and from the town asked me to have a short worship with them. And then we said to each other, our audience is not only there, facing the play, but in the other direction—the altar direction. Heaven is our audience. We didn't know then that that was to be one of the keys to the church-drama movement. As you know, it's a custom in theatre circles that after the first performance of a play the actors are awake the whole night until the newspapers come in the morning, and then they see what is written about it. We say, our critics come another day—and when we think of that, and not of the critics sitting there in the first range of chairs, then we are quiet in our hearts.

This was to be an essential tenet of the church-drama movement: we are playing "to God" rather than "to an audience," and that demands far greater artistic excellence.

The liturgical gussets also had a significant effect upon the audience. "The audience here didn't applaud, although they liked the play. They didn't behave as an audience. They behaved as a congregation. Why? Because of what was there instead of the curtain: the psalms . . . and at the end in the *Nunc Dimittis*. Then they sat there before the open-air altar as if they were praying."

III. DEVELOPING LITURGICAL PRINCIPLES

Not long after the initial presentations of *The Holy City*, Tuve Nyström approached Hartman and asked him to write a church drama based upon the liturgical principles in that play: the concept of the "other audience"—directing much of the dramatic action towards the altar itself; and the concept of audience as congregation. Not just one drama would come out of this request, but an entire phase of Hartman's work as a dramatist, covering the next decade. *Prophet and Carpenter* (*Profet och timmerman*) was written in 1954, *The Crown of Life* (*Livets krona*) in 1956, *The Fiery Furnace* (*Den brinnande ugnen*) in 1958, and *Mary's Quest* (*Marias oro*) in 1962. All of these were soon translated into English and introduced Hartman to broader audiences.

In spite of its quick beginning and "snowball" development, the Swedish church-drama movement was firmly based upon an international foundation of interest in matters pertaining to theology and the arts. The Religious Drama Society of Great Britain was already well-established, sporting such names as T. S. Eliot, Christopher Fry, Dorothy Sayers, and E. Martin Browne as supporters. In 1953, near Geneva, the World Council of

Churches had sponsored a conference on church and arts attended by painters, theatre people, architects, sculptors, musicians, authors, and theologians—among them, Olov Hartman.

There, Hartman heard German scholars debate the use of the arts in praise and proclamation. A Russian artist spoke of the icon as a concentrated dogmatics, a symbol in which ideas of the faith are attached to one another. A German architect, speaking of the church building as a testimony, reminded Hartman of the Swedish churches' living witness from generation to generation. A Scottish priest told of a theatre that had been donated to his church, and of its rich repertoire in Edinburgh. A Swiss-Dutch troupe spoke of its task as pure evangelization-proclamation: "Dire au Seigneur Jésus notre Hallelujah!" The conference ended in a resolution vindicating the mission of theology and the arts to function in unity in the church's worship. Hartman called the moment "a landslide which united previously divided continents."⁶ From it, he brought seeds that would germinate in Swedish soil.

"Drama in the sanctuary" was not a new concept. It had been done. And done. And done. Christmas pageants with leather-clad shepherds and wise men in robes and cardboard crowns. Biblical enactments and recitations *heavy* with scriptural content, a palliative against pietist criticism of theatre in the church. Chancels transformed into stages, with arrangements for entrances and exits, and with properties hiding the altar. Hartman and Nyström wanted no part of that.

They wanted a style more integral to the church's *worship*. *The Holy City* was their model. Nyström had respected the "holy space" of the open-air church. The primary focus was upon the altar. There was no room, ideologically or literally, for scenery and props. Movements, costumes, lighting all had to be minimalized, stylized, suggestive—liturgical. When Nyström staged *Prophet and Carpenter*, he worked with a "statuary" mode of staging, geometric positioning of characters, brief but distinct movements that were symbolic and laden with dramatic significance. The staging was compatible with the chorus' recitation and Gregorian intonation, the liturgical costumes, the absence of makeup, sets, and properties. The entire sanctuary, congregation and all, was now Jonah's ship, now the kingdom of death, now the city of Nineveh. Nyström created a dramatic intensity that earned for him comparisons with German playwright Bertolt Brecht and Soviet film director Sergei Mikhailovich Eisenstein. Both author and director sought in *kyrkospel* a unity: within the drama, within the church building, in interrelationship with all other church arts—all to serve the liturgy and all to focus upon the altar. The

⁶ Olov Hartman, "Jordskred i kyrkokonsten," *Stockholms Tidning*, May 8, 1953.

language of the church drama was to be the symbolic language of prayer and proclamation, clear and brief, to interpret and translate the reality of God's Word, and not to suggest some other reality. Brevity was appropriate because neither God nor the congregation needed naturalistic illusion or pedagogical prolixity. The symbolic intensity of the unexplained liturgy would be more involving than verbose sermonization in dramatic guise.⁷ The dichotomy in theatre between stage and audience now became in church-drama a unity in which both audience and actors were part of a single congregation whose attention was directed upon the drama of the altar. All theatrical effects (lighting, makeup, costumes, music, plastic elements) were to be abandoned in order to give priority to the proclamation of the Word—the Word enacted, the Word demonstrated, the Word made flesh. Nyström explained it this way:

If you have to *demonstrate* the message, you can't add very much to what your body and voice can do. Yourself as God's creation. Because it is so easy that the arrangements can become a kind of wall between what you want to say and point out—instead of the stuff that voice and body can tell directly to the public as you are, as God's creation.⁸

The principles that Hartman and Nyström developed in order to create a theatrical style organic to the church's liturgy bear a striking resemblance to the principles Jerzy Grotowski propounded a decade later in advocating a "poor theatre."⁹ Tuve Nyström later, in fact, became fascinated by Grotowski's work, working towards such "poverty" that could engender, through the church drama, new life and expression in worship.

IV. FROM 1954 TO 1962

Both amateurs and professional theatre people worked together in this new type of sanctuary drama, this *kyrkospel*. Most of the amateurs were familiar with the church's devotional life, accustomed to reading and praying in the chancel. In order to meet the stringent Hartman-Nyström demands imposed upon church drama, they needed training in the disciplines of theatre. But the professional theatre people also needed training to familiarize them with disciplines of worship and liturgy. There was no room for any sort of "shoddiness"—dramatic or liturgical.

In the late summer of 1955, some twenty priests and laypersons gathered in

⁷ Olov Hartman, *Fyra kyrkospel* (Stockholm: Rabén & Sjögren, 1970), 9.

⁸ Interview with Tuve Nyström, August 31, 1970.

⁹ See Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968), especially the chapters, "Towards a Poor Theatre" and "The Theatre's New Testament."

Sigtuna for a course of training and discussion of church drama. By the conclusion of the course, the participants had created *Förbundet för liturgi och dramatik* (FLOD), The Fellowship of Liturgy and Drama. Tuve Nyström would be its first advisory officer. Through FLOD, the movement that had begun with Hartman and had centered about Sigtuna and Stockholm would seek to broaden and decentralize through courses, demonstrations, and lectures designed to create new church-drama groups on various levels throughout the country and eventually throughout Scandinavia. By 1960, this new movement involved nearly seven thousand participants.¹⁰

By the end of 1956, some twenty thousand people had seen performances of the two Hartman church dramas *Prophet and Carpenter* and *The Crown of Life*.¹¹ In 1956, the Swedish press gave extensive coverage to the phenomenon that was reconciling the divorce between church and theatre supported by church fathers from Tertullian and Lactantius to the pietists of the fifties. The mass itself was, after all, recognized as a drama about God's plan of salvation—a fact the church could certify without taking a position on the theories that said that all theatre had arisen from worship. Critic Ivar Harrie encouraged Christians to take up the challenge begun by Hartman and use drama as a tool for both missionary and liturgical work, adding that Hartman's work in church drama "is the most daring experiment in Swedish theatre in living memory . . . and that the experiment at the same time is shaking church conventions down at the foundations."¹² Olof Wennås reported that the movement had even infiltrated the pious walls of the Free Church in Sweden, pointing to the remarkable fact that the Free Church journal had published an entire issue devoted to church drama.¹³ Support for the use of drama, said Wennås, could be derived from the fact that this church had long been accustomed to using forms of communication other than the spoken word, that religious as well as secular education could be vitalized through the graphic arts, and that biblical literature itself is more nearly dramatic than epic—in fact, the Bible as a unity is a drama. Drama, he concluded, is no more "sinful" a means of communication than any other.¹⁴

Per Helin outlined the extraordinary growth of the church-drama move-

¹⁰ Olov Hartman, "Tro och skådespel," *Aftonbladet* (Stockholm), August 4, 1960.

¹¹ "Kyrkospelet ny giv hos oss Gud publik i liturgidrama," *Västra Nyland* (Ekenäs), January 12, 1957.

¹² Ivar Harrie, "Hartmans kyrkospel äkta kristen teater," *Expressen* (Stockholm), May 7, 1956.

¹³ Olof Wennås, "Dramatik med kristet ärende," *Svenska Morgonbladet* (Stockholm), July 5, 1956.

¹⁴ Wennås, "Dramatisk framställningsform i kristen tjänst," *Svenska Morgonbladet* (Stockholm), August 24, 1956.

ment, from the "brilliant" activity of the professional FLOD ensemble to the notable contributions of smaller groups with fewer resources, among them a new group from the Christian Student Association in Uppsala whose "exceptional" efforts were "bordering on the professional." By this time, he noted, the movement, with its well-organized courses and training laboratories employing large numbers of Swedish theater personnel, could be considered on firm ground, on a level with the Religious Drama Society of Great Britain.¹⁵ Public interest in the church-drama movement exemplified in the newspaper debate initiated by an "open letter" to Olov Hartman from a Free Church Lundensian, Lennart Olsson, interestingly titled: "Should Culture Become the Kingdom of Heaven's Fishhook?"¹⁶ This gave Hartman a further opportunity to outline the tenets of church drama as a means by which "the gospel can wrest [such things as drama] out of the greedy devil's power," admitting drama into the church rather than committing theater to the devil, "as Christendom has done in several places."¹⁷ Hartman's response was: "Church drama: To Bring Sermon and Prayer Down into the Sinner's Real World." In another contribution to the press, Hartman made the important reminder that church drama was not a reversion to an ancient form now having a "comeback" in Sweden. It was, instead, a matter of going beyond medieval sources to the roots of liturgy and to the liturgical life of the church.¹⁸

V. SWEDEN'S UNIQUE CONTRIBUTION

In July of 1960, the second World Conference on Christianity and Drama was held at the *Cercle Culturel* in Royaumont, north of Paris. Delegations of artists and theologians from various nations described the work being carried out in their own countries in various types and levels of drama. One of the best-established efforts in this field was that of the Religious Drama Society of Great Britain, represented by T. S. Eliot. Eliot spoke of the way the church had "saved the theatre" in England, creating a new epoch within English theater.

What sort of contribution could the Swedish delegation make to such an assembly? There had been occasions on which Christian problems had appeared on the professional stage, as when Graham Greene's *The Living*

¹⁵ Per Helin, "Kristen dramatik erövrar ny mark," *Stockholms Tidningen*, August 12, 1956.

¹⁶ Lennart Olsson, "Får kulturen bli himmelrikets metkrok?" *Expressen* (Stockholm), August 30, 1956.

¹⁷ Olov Hartman, "Kyrkospel: att dra ner predikan och bön till syndarens verklighet," *Expressen* (Stockholm), August 31, 1956.

¹⁸ Olov Hartman, "Kyrkospelets dilemma," *Stockholms Tidning*, February 16, 1956.

Room was performed at the Stockholm Theatre, *Dramaten*. Of course, Hartman was obliged to point out that the occasion was somewhat marred by the fact that one protester suggested raising the plague flag over the theatre during the run of this drama. On another occasion, Philip W. Turner's *Christ in the Concrete City* was aired professionally as a street drama in Stockholm's *Kungsträdgården*. But events such as these were meager compared with similar theatre events in Great Britain.

What Sweden *did* have to offer, however, was *kyrkospel*, the church drama—unique to Sweden. And although the idea had met with little but passing interest at the Oxford Conference five years earlier, the movement had now grown surprisingly strong with its comprehensive training programs and burgeoning groups of players. Rather than again *telling* the assembly *about* church drama, the Swedish group presented Hartman's *The Fiery Furnace*. By the time it was over, it was clear that the *kyrkospel* idea from Sweden was the only new idea to emerge during the week. Nyström's direction openly won the respect of the professional theatre artists there. And the audience had for the first time abandoned its pose as an audience. On this occasion, it had become a worshipping congregation.¹⁹

VI. LATER TRENDS IN CHURCH DRAMA

All of Hartman's earlier church dramas had been based upon biblical material. *Prophet and Carpenter* took its theme from the story of Jonah, *The Crown of Life* was based upon the story of the fall, *The Fiery Furnace* derived from the Book of Daniel, and *Mary's Quest* dealt with Mary's seeking the twelve-year-old Jesus. In an article written in 1962, he announced that church history, including the saints, would be fair game. In 1960, there was held in Uppsala an eight-hundredth-anniversary commemoration of the death of St. Erik, patron saint of the Uppsala Cathedral. A group of interested patrons asked Hartman to take up pen for this occasion, and *The Crusader* (*Korsfararen*) was born. The relation of a play such as this to the liturgy was rather "loose"—related to the ecclesiastical year when the play is performed as a commemoration on the saint's day. While the Confession of the Swedish Church did not permit invoking the saints, a "miracle play" such as *The Crusader* could provide a means for demonstrating and celebrating their good works, and displaying the Christian faith in action. Critics felt, however, that the play lacked the dramatic strength of his earlier church dramas. That

¹⁹ Olov Hartman, "Dramat och kyrkan på världskonferens i Royaumont," *Aftonbladet* (Stockholm), August 5, 1960.

strength came from the focal use of the altar and the strong liturgical referents. This was the first (and only) Hartman drama not to make use of these. One reviewer made the following observation, after having discussed the tremendous success of Hartman's church dramas, which he epitomized in *The Fiery Furnace*:

What is remarkable . . . is that when he wrote *The Fiery Furnace* with the intention of creating a liturgical play, he succeeded also from a theatre point of view. And there it may be more and more that the professional theatre, still, in the future, has much to gain from Olov Hartman. For in the liturgical dimension he lives and moves with unerring sureness. Here, his talents can bloom without limitation. Craftsmanship is seldom anything for a genius.²⁰

Hartman wrote no more miracle plays. His next drama, *Fire for an Altar* (*Eld för ett altare*), also dealt with the life of a saint, but it had a scriptural text as its foundation and was therefore strongly focused upon altar and infused with liturgy. In fact, *Fire for an Altar* totally involved the congregation, ending in the Eucharist. *Fire for an Altar* and Hartman's next three dramas—*Counterpoint* (*Kontrapunkt*), *On That Day* (*Bäraren*), and *After Us* (*Efter oss*)—are less insistently liturgical and have a more openly dramatic quality. In fact, Hartman was no longer referring to them as church drama, merely as drama. *Fire for an Altar* represented a special turning point toward greater dramatic freedom. Its premier performance was not even in a church sanctuary, but in a forest glade on Högsten island in the Oxelösund archipelago, where it was heralded as a "new way of spreading the gospel in a secularized world."²¹

In the mid-sixties, an "experimental" church building—the *studiokyrka*—was built in Sigtuna to accommodate Hartman's and Nyström's work. A simple, totally flexible building, about ten meters square, it was magnificently suited to the flexibility and experimentation desired at this point in the church-drama movement. With movable altar and benches, it could be arranged to accommodate the earlier types of church drama. But it could also be arranged for worship and performances "in the square" with the altar at one side or in the middle, and so provide for even greater audience participation. Here, in October of 1967, Nyström staged the first performances of *Counterpoint*, abandoning everything of a liturgical nature and producing the drama as a *demonstrationspel*. A strong anti-war drama, it would fit in with Hartman's desire that it be not just "another play—a polite piece of work"

²⁰ Rune Pär Olofsson, "Hartmans drama om St. Erik," *Stockholms Tidning*, July 27, 1962.

²¹ "Eld för ett altare," *Svenska Dagbladet* (Stockholm), July 22, 1968.

people can see and then forget about. "I hope," he said, "that you shouldn't forget that for a moment you were shaken—you were angry or something, but you were in it—you responded to it." It was thus performed on Stockholm television, Good Friday 1968. The response was, as Hartman wished, "visceral."

VII. COUNTERPOINT AS AN INAUGURAL "ADDRESS"

The Swedish church-drama movement (*kyrkospelrörelsen*) has touched many people's lives since the early 1950s. It has had a major impact upon my teaching, my preaching, and, I hope, my living. Olov himself, the little man with the beret, has cast a big shadow over my life. Once he entered into my life, many connections between theology and drama were made. And there are still many mysteries.

I went back to Sweden this past summer, from mid-May to the end of June, to see if I could discover what kind of influences the church-drama movement has had upon other people's lives—especially in the realm of preaching, worship, and spiritual formation. I learned that two people are now in ministry specifically because of the impact of Hartman's *Counterpoint* upon their lives. Two people are now teaching homiletics—one of them Tuve's son Hans Cristian. Two are teaching liturgics. Several are pastors. One is an icon painter. Another a prolific musician. The *kyrkospel* troupe in the Lund parish is still going strong. We sat through a performance of their latest production, *Renata och sjökungen* (*Renata and the Sea King*), on a Sunday afternoon in June. A former *kyrkospel* group leader, now a pastor, uses drama in his communicants' classes—moving them to "act out" their faith and "do the Word." Summer church-drama groups are formed "just for the season." There are still numerous *kyrkospel* groups in Finland. Former church-drama participants, many of them now grandparents, get together and do "reruns" of some of their favorite plays—just for the joy of once again letting the Word become flesh.

Olov died in 1982, and Tuve joined him two years later. The big "movement" that began mid-century has died down to a simmer now. But the spirit of Olov Hartman and Tuve Nyström is still very much alive. It is being given expression in many ways, overt and subtle, in which the church is going "beyond words"—especially beyond "words about words about words . . ." to proclaim the gospel. It's *that* kind of proclamation I wanted to be a part of my inaugural presentation.

VIII. FROM MY JOURNAL

While I was in Sweden this past summer, I kept a journal. I share a small portion of it here because it reveals my "on the spot" reflections about the

Hartman-Nyström-Sigtuna experience. These notes are from day two, May 20, 1999. I had dinner that evening with Tuve's son, Hans Cristian (called HK ["Ho-Ko"]), his wife Åsa, and their three children—Josef, Daniel, and Johanna. I had not seen HK since the summer of 1970. He was then eleven years old. He now is a priest in the Church of Sweden and teaches homiletics and liturgics at the *Johannelunds Teologiska Högskola* in Uppsala.

At 5 p.m., HK picked me up at Sigtunastiftelsen and we drove to Uppsala. Stopped on the way to his home, and met his fourteen-year-old son Daniel (and his *kompis* Katarina) at *Teatertaket*, a theatre center where Daniel and his young friends were receiving theatre training. Then off to Storvreta for dinner with HK and his wife Åsa (also a teacher at Johannelund). Daughter Johanna, ten years old, joined us for dinner. It was to be a full evening. Åsa had a meeting to attend in town. And their new computer (*dator*) was about to be delivered. Just before HK was to leave to drive Åsa to her meeting, the computer and all its components arrived at the door. I finished rinsing dishes and loading the dishwasher while HK and Åsa were gone. Sixteen-year-old Josef appeared and, with my wet hands, we introduced ourselves. Soon Josef and Daniel were busy unpacking computer components in the study.

When HK returned, he and I sat at the kitchen table and talked. "Tell me about Princeton Theological Seminary. Tell me about your teaching." My "life story" ensued. My lifelong interest in languages (and the never-realized dream to work with Wycliffe Bible translators), my altogether unprofessional experiences in theatre—acting, singing, writing musicals. My years of voice training as a singer. All this had contributed greatly to my teaching. The fact that I taught so much "by ear" before eventually being able to formulate things like voice placement, voice quality. The nearly thirty years of teaching before I finally put down my ideas into my first two books.

I told him I had met Olov and Tuve at a church-drama workshop in Lake Forest, Illinois, during the summer of 1966. When it came time to focus upon a topic for my Ph.D. dissertation at Columbia just a few years later, I was drawn to Olov and Tuve's work as a likely topic. My association with them had been formative in influencing my teaching, my preaching, my spiritual life.

"How so?" HK asked. I began to realize for myself, and to try to put into so many words, just how it *was* so. Olov and Tuve had been my quintessential models in "doing the word." They had taken proclaiming the Word of God beyond Olov's lament about sermons as "words about words about words about words." Their "preaching" was in the form of drama—

kyrkospel. Their preaching was *Incarnational*. I began to speak about how *internalizing* was for me such an important concept in any handling of the Word—reading scripture or preaching. I mentioned Maria with the tight throat who had read Genesis 22 with that strained voice. I told how I had said, “Maria, read the passage *as Abraham*: “After these things God tested me, and said to me, ‘Abraham!’” with the result of an entirely free voice—because she was not reading as Maria. She had become Abraham!

I spoke of the importance of *incarnating* the gospel in our preaching (and in our lives). I mentioned how my “verse format” as opposed to the “paragraph format” of writing sermon manuscripts helped students move away from their well-taught habit of writing “for the eye”—for people to read. It enabled them to move into a new mode, writing “for the ear,” which helped so much in speaking the Word of God incarnationally, naturally, in one’s God-indwelt *persona* and not as some sort of “talking head” preacher.

I recalled Sigurd’s comments about how Tuve had been so influenced by Jerzy Grotowski of the Polish Laboratory Theatre. Grotowski’s “theatre” was, purely and simply, the *actor*, the actor’s *voice*, the actor’s *body*. Theatre *incarnate*. I remembered my course in acting at Columbia, where I first read the writings of Konstantin Stanislavski. Remembered Stanislavski teaching his students in one set of words and I was hearing other words: “I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.” Stanislavski saying something else, and my hearing, “For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” Remembered another echo: “He must increase, but I must decrease.” Stanislavski and Paul and John were all saying the same thing: “*Become! Become! Become! Incarnate the Word of God!*”

St. Francis had said it centuries earlier: “Preach the gospel at all times. If necessary, use words.”

Incarnational preaching. Living the Word. Being the Word, the Presence of the Risen Christ to one another. Doing the Word. Konstantin, Paul, John, Francis, Olov, Tuve, Jerzy had all been my mentors. I was just now realizing how very much this was true, and just now being able to put it into so many words.

Josef and Daniel had nearly finished assembling their computer when HK and I had to return to Sigtuna. More talking on the way back. And some periods of reflective silence. I remembered the several times while sharing my ideas with HK that I had said to myself, “I wonder if this makes sense?” I hadn’t tried to say this to HK because we were speaking Swedish, and I couldn’t figure precisely how to say what I meant in Swedish. As we

drove back, it hit me how much in my teaching I punctuate my ideas with "Does that make sense?" I want to make sure students understand what I'm trying to get across. Probably because I'm never altogether sure I'm really not talking ununderstandable gibberish. Finally I said to HK, "HK, how would one say in Swedish, 'Does that make sense?'" I realized I couldn't say "Förstår du?" ("Do you understand?"). Because that would place the burden for understanding upon my hearers. "Do *you* understand? I know *I'm* making perfectly intelligible statements from my vast storehouse of wisdom, but are you intelligent enough to get it?" No, the burden was not theirs. It was mine. Am I being clear in expressing what I want, what I need, to say? I thought of the word *sinne*: sense. Could I say, "Är det *sinnlig*?" But *sinne* means not only "sense" as in "common sense," it also refers to that which is sensual, sensuous. And then the light bulb of revelation came on: For me, "making sense" is an admixture, a marriage, of "head sense" and "whole person, whole body sense": an understanding of the whole person. An *incarnational* kind of understanding.

God wanted to tell us and show us how much He loves us. He could say, in words, "Hey, I really love you!" Head sense. But He knew we wouldn't get it, not *really* get it. And so He told us, showed us, incarnationally. Whole person sense. Whole body sense. Here I am, in the flesh, loving you. Here I am living and moving and having my being among you, loving you. Here I am being judged by you, loving you. Here I am on the cross, loving you. Here I am rising from the dead so that you might never die, loving you. Here I am sending my Holy Spirit to empower you, loving you. Incarnational love. Incarnational preaching. Incarnational making sense.

"Does that make sense?"

J. Christiaan Beker: A Tribute (1924–1999)

by DANIEL L. MIGLIORE

This memorial minute was prepared by Daniel L. Migliore, Charles Hodge Professor of Systematic Theology, and was delivered at the faculty meeting on October 13, 1999.

J. CHRISTIAAN BEKER was born on May 15, 1924, in the village of Gorssel in Holland where his father was pastor of a Dutch Reformed Church.¹ A few years later, the family moved to Haarlem, a thriving Dutch city famous for its tulips and artists, and it was here that Chris spent his boyhood. It was not destined to be a happy one. In May 1940, Germany invaded Holland, and for the next five years Chris' life was filled with turmoil and misery.

Chris had many Jewish classmates in his gymnasium in Haarlem, but soon after the German occupation his Jewish classmates began disappearing. Chris himself had to go underground to avoid being recruited by the Nazis to work in one of their forced-labor camps in Germany. To avoid bringing reprisals on his father and other members of his family, Chris eventually presented himself for deportation and was taken to a factory near Berlin. There, he would come down with typhus and would endure the terror of daily and nightly bombardments. His decision to become a theologian was made during this period of brutality. After some months, because he was so sick and a burden to his German captors, Chris was permitted to return home. When he recovered, however, he once again had to go into hiding, living secretly in his family's attic for many months, in constant fear of betrayal or discovery. About all these events, Chris remained silent for many decades. But the scars were deep, and he suffered from a manic-depressive condition for the rest of his life.

After the war, Chris studied theology at the University of Utrecht, receiving the B.D. degree in 1948. He was awarded a World Council of Churches' scholarship and chose to study at the University of Chicago where he received his doctoral degree in 1955. While at the University of Chicago, he served as assistant to the chaplain. Between 1956–1959, he taught New Testament at Union Theological Seminary in New York, and from 1959–1964 was associate professor of New Testament Theology at the Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, California.

Dr. Beker was invited to Princeton Theological Seminary in 1964 as visiting professor of New Testament and then served as professor of Biblical

¹ For a biographical essay on J. Christiaan Beker, see Ben C. Ollenburger, "Suffering and Hope: The Story behind the Book," in *Theology Today* 44 (1987), 350–9.

Theology at the Seminary from 1966–1995. At Princeton, Chris proved to be an exceedingly popular teacher, both at the M. Div. and the Ph.D. levels. His classes were always heavily enrolled. He was a restless spirit, unconventional, sensitive to injustice, impatient with pretense. He knew from the scriptural witness and from his own experience the wide and painful chasm between the realities of a groaning creation and the promised triumph of the God of the gospel.

Professor Beker was the author of ten books: *The Church Faces the World* (1960); *Commitment without Ideology* (1973); *Easter* (1974); *Paul the Apostle* (1980); *Paul's Apocalyptic Gospel* (1982); *Suffering and Hope* (1987); *Der Sieg Gottes* (1988); *The Triumph of God* (1990); *The Heirs of Paul* (1991); *The New Testament: A Thematic Introduction* (1994).

Chris' teaching and writings were characterized by a consistently intense and probing examination of the letters of the Apostle Paul; by a theological vigor that made him stand out among his New Testament colleagues and brought him into frequent conversation and debate with systematic theologians; by his resolute insistence on the inseparability of the Old and New Testaments and the crucial importance of the church's recognition of this bond; by his active participation in the Jewish-Christian dialogue; by a profound grasp of the dialectic of suffering and hope, etched deep in his soul by his study of the biblical witness and his own life experience; and above all, by his unflagging faith in the sovereignty and victory of the just and gracious God.

In his inaugural lecture at Princeton Seminary in 1968, Professor Beker concluded with these words:

[Our sense of] the irrelevance of New Testament spirituality may be our inability to come to terms with the one central question posed to us by the Bible: "My God—My God—why hast thou forsaken me?" Through the words "My God" shines the resurrection light, and thus the affirmation of life through death—the peculiar trust that the absence of God is the pledge for his presence. Whoever possesses this secret has perhaps found a way to overcome his identity-crisis in the midst of crisis.

And in his final sermon in Miller Chapel, a meditation on Psalm 103, "Bless the Lord, O my soul," Professor Beker said,

my blessing of the Lord . . . must necessarily include the urgent petition that God's sovereign majesty and steadfast love . . . will lift the burden of suffering of the oppressed of the earth, and that God will complete the fullness of his blessing by embracing his groaning creation in his loving arms.

After a long illness, Professor Beker died on July 12, 1999. To Chris' beloved wife Terri and to his son Dirk, the faculty of Princeton Seminary extends our sincere condolences. In this moment of sadness and gratitude, we say to our departed colleague and friend: "Rest in peace in God's everlasting arms," and we join in the acclamation that sums up the message of the Apostle Paul, the faith of the Reformed tradition, and J. Christiaan Beker's own faith: *solī Deo gloria*.

J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians: A Review* Essay

Beverly Roberts Gaventa is the Helen H. P. Manson Professor of New Testament Literature and Exegesis at Princeton Theological Seminary. She is the author of First and Second Thessalonians (1998).

by BEVERLY ROBERTS GAVENTA

J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. New York: Doubleday, 1997. Pp. 614. \$29.95.

“Reading Paul’s letter to his Galatian churches is like coming in on a play as the curtain is rising on the third or fourth act.” With that striking analogy for an opening line, we suspect that what J. Louis Martyn, Edward Robinson Professor Emeritus of Biblical Theology at Union Theological Seminary, New York, offers in this commentary will be something out of the ordinary. The pages that follow more than confirm that suspicion. Indeed, the Anchor Bible commentary on Galatians departs so sharply from what we have come to expect from a scholarly commentary that it stretches the limits of the genre.

In Martyn’s reconstruction, the drama that has developed in the Galatian churches looks something like this: Through Paul’s initial proclamation of the gospel, God had reached out for the Galatians and they had received the Spirit and were “born as vibrantly alive members of the church of the true God.” After his departure, Christian-Jewish Teachers arrived who claimed for themselves the authority of the Jerusalem church and insisted that the Galatians needed to observe the ancient law of Sinai, a law confirmed forever by God’s Christ and necessary to prevent moral chaos. (Martyn adopts the nomenclature “Teachers” because the group is carrying out an independent Gentile mission, not merely an opposition to Paul; the term also avoids the anti-Jewish connotations of “Judaizers.”) In response to the news that some in the Galatian churches had found this message persuasive, Paul crafts a letter in which he “repreaches” the gospel. The letter belongs, then, not in the category of argument, but in that of announcement.

Two closely related issues emerge as paramount in Martyn’s understanding of Paul, both of which show the deep influence of the late Ernst Käsemann. First, what is at stake for Paul is nothing less than God’s own invasion of the cosmos in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. This emphasis on the cosmic apocalyptic character of the letter distinguishes Martyn from the classical Protestant readings of Galatians that imagine the addressees of the letter as individuals who confront a choice between faith in Jesus Christ and the keeping of Mosaic Law. Perhaps more important, it also distinguishes Martyn

from a number of recent interpreters (the so-called "New Perspective") who see the letter as concerned with the conditions on which Gentiles may enter into Israel. Second, Martyn perceives in Paul a relentless insistence that the direction in which the gospel moves is *from* God *to* humanity rather than the other way around. At a number of points, Martyn distinguishes Paul from "two ways" views of the world, in which human beings *choose* between God's way and not-God's way, between good and evil. The gospel also stands over against religion, "the various communal, cultic means . . . by which human beings seek to know and to be happily related to the gods or God" since the gospel derives exclusively from God's initiative and not from that of human beings.

Reflecting these convictions, the commentary takes a number of exegetical positions that are both startlingly fresh and highly controversial. A few examples are necessary, although simply noting them cannot possibly do justice to the rich argumentation that stands behind them. Martyn contends that in Galatians 3 Paul claims not simply that the promise to Abraham and Abraham's singular seed, Jesus, is better than or earlier than the Law, but that an antinomous relationship exists between God's promise and the Law, a Law that comes into being by the work of angels rather than by God. Regarding the allegory on Hagar and Sarah in 4:21-5:1, Martyn finds that Paul contrasts *not* Judaism and Christianity, but two *Gentile* missions, the enslaving mission of the Teachers and Torah-free mission of Paul and his colleagues. Concerning 5:14, Martyn argues that the Law is brought to completion (NRSV: "summed up") by Christ himself, so that the much-contested phrase of 6:2 refers to "the Law that Christ has brought to completion for the life of the church." This insight means that what interpreters conventionally refer to as the "ethical" section of the letter does not actually prescribe behavior, instead, it depicts the outpouring of Christ's achievement in and for the church.

In my judgment, Martyn argues convincingly at these and many other points. Precisely because I do find so much here that is persuasive, I covet from the commentary more attention to the phrase "male and female" in 3:28 and its implications for the remainder of the letter. Martyn seems content to point to the new creation motif here and in 6:15 (and notice also the careful treatment of the adoption metaphors in 4:8-11). Still, questions remain. How might women among the Galatian churches hear this phrase? What relationship does it have to the presence of birth imagery at several points in the letter (1:15; 4:19; 4:21-5:1)? How did Paul imagine that women in the Galatian churches would hear the extended discussion of circumcision?

A catalogue of positions taken does not suffice to introduce this commentary, however. Unlike too many commentaries in recent decades, Martyn is not content to treat Galatians as a gaggle of technical problems, for each of which the appropriate response is to offer a list of alternative solutions and then argue for one. Instead, he proceeds in an audacious fashion, crafting a piercing and unified interpretation of the letter. Other scholars come into the conversation, to be sure, but not merely to be itemized and assessed. The conversation partners do not emerge only from the technical literature of New Testament scholarship, they range from William Blake to Flannery O'Connor, from Karl Barth to Daniel Boyarin.

These very strengths necessarily mean that this commentary will frustrate some readers. Precisely because it is a sustained and integrated reading of the letter, it will make little sense to those who wish to read it in six-page segments, raiding it for juicy tidbits about a particular verse. Where such reading practice is necessary, the brief introduction offers a much-needed synopsis of the drama of Galatians and will make smaller units accessible. Readers should be forewarned, however: Martyn's *Galatians* is so enticing that brief excursions into this volume may turn into long journeys.

Another frustrating strength of the commentary stems from Martyn's habit of imagining earlier and subsequent acts of the Galatian drama, crafting words that the Teachers might have used while instructing the Galatian churches or responses Paul hopes to elicit from the Galatians with his letter. These daring acts of imagination will leave some readers scratching their heads and others grumbling about the risks of "mirror reading." Practiced by a less mature and skillful reader, these interpretive strategies would be disastrous. Here, they signal a truly magisterial commentary, one that is as theologically penetrating as it is exegetically bold.

To a generation grown accustomed to scholarly works that have been cooked up in a microwave and dished out on paper plates, J. Louis Martyn's *Galatians* offers "Babette's Feast" instead.

BOOK REVIEWS

Dupuis, Jacques. *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1997. Pp. 433. \$38.50.

Only occasionally is a book of this importance published. The title, *Toward a Christian Theology* . . . is overly modest, for this is a careful and extensive analysis of a question that has been discussed since the early church fathers, a dilemma debated with growing intensity during the past century. Dupuis' approach is both chronological and thematic. He is thorough, clear, and unambiguous about his own position while respectful and evenhanded toward those with whom he takes issue. His goal is to move the discussion of religious pluralism beyond the exclusivist-inclusivist polarities, and I believe he achieves this objective. At first blush, his use of the trinitarian formula may appear to some as a kind of theological legerdemain, but a careful reading will dispel this notion. The triune God for Dupuis is simply the means by which Christians can find the uniqueness *as well as* the universality of ultimate reality revealed. He does not imply that the Triune God is one among many or the fulfillment toward which every religion is wittingly or unwittingly moving, neither is the triune God the "penultimate sign of the Real." The God revealed as Father, Son, and Spirit, Dupuis contends, is "Ultimate Reality itself."

How Dupuis develops and relates this concept—"the mystery of the Trinity"—to other religions, to Judaism and Islam as well as to Hinduism and Buddhism, is for me the most intriguing part of the book. He does not reduce what are substantive differences to mere semantics or to a warm and fuzzy, amorphous pluralism. He also does not presume to see other faiths as "stepping stones" to Christianity. Other faiths, he insists, offer additional, needed, and in a sense, indispensable perspectives on the mystery of what is ultimate reality. Yet all of the religious traditions of the world, separately or together—including the Christian tradition—cannot and do not completely apprehend or exhaust the ineffable mystery of God.

More divine truth and grace are found operative in the entire history of God's dealings with humankind than are available simply in the Christian tradition. As the "human face" or "icon" of God, Jesus Christ gives to Christianity its specific and singular character. But, while he is constitutive [a crucial point for Dupuis] of salvation for all, he neither excludes nor includes other saving figures or traditions. If he brings salvation history to a climax, it is by way not of substitution or supersession but of confirma-

tion The truth to which Christianity witnesses is neither exclusive nor inclusive of all other truth; it is related to all that is true in other religions.

Dupuis is a Belgian Jesuit and professor of theology at the Gregorian University in Rome. One would therefore expect to find in this work references to and discussions of the theologies of Justin, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Cyprian, Augustine, Bellarmine, Danielou, Rahner, Panikkar, Pieris, Küng, and Knitter. But Dupuis also gives ample attention to important Protestant theologies of religions—to the contributions of Farquhar, Barth, Cullmann, and Tillich, as well as Samartha, Cantwell Smith, Song, Cobb, Hick, and Mark Heim. Some notable Protestant works on the subject, such as the essays and books by Clark Pinnock, John Sanders, and Kenneth Cragg are not included, and these are regrettable omissions. But taken as a whole, this is a monumental work that I believe moves the discussion in the right direction.

After beginning with a review of early Christian approaches to other religions—including the few words attributed to Jesus on the subject and the theology of the primitive church—Dupuis analyzes the cosmic Christology of the early church fathers. Then in chronological sequence, he summarizes and assesses the important Christian theories regarding other religions from the time of Cyprian through the Council of Trent and Vatican II, and concludes the first part of the book with the more recent views regarding ecclesiocentrism, christocentrism, and theocentrism. As already stated, Dupuis notes nearly everyone who has written substantively on the issue, though naturally more attention is given to Catholic than to non-Catholic thought.

In the final section of the book, Dupuis addresses the question of God's covenant and the salvation of the Jews; revelation and other sacred books; Jesus as the one and the universal; the path and the paths to salvation; the relation of the reign of God to other religions and to the church; and the place of interreligious dialogue and mission.

To say this is an important work is an understatement. It is, as one has described it, "a magisterial book" that faces forthrightly the deepest questions arising out of the Christian belief in God's self-disclosure in Jesus Christ and salvation of the world.

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Schwarz, Hans. *Christology*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998. Pp. 325. \$25.00.

We are well in the throes of a "third quest" for the historical Jesus. The nineteenth-century German debate over the relationship of the "historical Jesus" to the "Christ of faith" is alive and well in twentieth-century America. This book offers a response to this debate—one that steers a "middle course" between historical research and confession of faith in Christ.

The most valuable section of the book, in my view, is the first part, which offers an overview of the three "quests" for the historical Jesus. Beginning with Reimarus, Lessing, and Semler, it discusses key nineteenth-century figures (e.g., Kant, Schleiermacher, and Hegel) culminating in a discussion of both Albert Schweitzer's "first quest" and the rise of the social gospel movement. It then probes Martin Kähler's and the whole neoorthodox movement's response to Schweitzer, concluding with a treatment of Ernst Käsemann's and others' call for a "new" historical quest. The last section discusses the current "third wave," with Marcus Borg, among others, as its chief exemplar.

The second part of the book surveys "the biblical testimony and its assessment through history." After analyzing historical information on Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, Schwarz first portrays the picture of Jesus Christ given in each of the Gospels and in Paul, and then deals with christological reflection in the history of Western theology—the trajectory including Irenaeus, Tertullian, Athanasius and Arius, Anselm, Luther, and Calvin, in addition to key modern figures (e.g., Schleiermacher, Kierkegaard, Barth, and Tillich).

The third part analyzes key issues in contemporary Christology—from a response to Lessing's "ugly ditch" (between the accidents of history and the necessity of reason) to a discussion of the nature of Jesus' Jewishness and self-awareness. Other key themes discussed include the meaning of Jesus' death and resurrection, the absoluteness and uniqueness of Christian testimony to Jesus of Nazareth, and the links between christological claims, the "kingdom of God and the church," and the "return of Christ."

Throughout, Schwarz is judicious in his theological and historical conclusions. Students will benefit from his balanced surveys. This is not to say that he does not have a constructive argument. His thesis, in a nutshell, is that Jesus of Nazareth is, indeed, the "human face of God." Although he affirms with Kähler that "that which can be unearthed about the historical Jesus who stands behind the Gospels will always be less than the Christ of the apostolic preaching of the whole New Testament," he nonetheless also contends that "there exists a continuity between the two." This thesis—as exemplified in Schwarz's careful analyses—is precisely the book's chief contribution. Nonetheless, this thesis could have been developed with somewhat less analysis and

more synthetic theological argument—at least in the third section. For example, Luther's understanding of the *communicatio idiomatum* and the implications this has had for Schwarz's (and before him Kähler's) entire argument—whether implicitly or explicitly—could have been developed in much more depth.

While well-researched, the work represents a definite time and place in christological history—one that emerged out of the post-Enlightenment German university context. The bulk of Schwarz's modern references are to writings from the 1970s and 1980s. This literature is important but we should note what is not mentioned: postmodern contributions to hermeneutics, reference to the global and multi-ethnic character of Christological work, and contemporary discussions of supersessionism and the election of Israel. Moreover, Roman Catholic biblical scholarship is less prominent and contemporary spirit and wisdom Christologies are not discussed extensively.

These observations do not in any way detract from the significance of this book and its usefulness, especially as a standard textbook and reference. Overall, it provides an excellent overview of key historical and contemporary issues in christological research; it is consistently fair and accurate even as it drives at what lies at the heart of each topic and issue. It serves as a reliable and comprehensive guide to the literature that neither condescends to the specialist nor excludes the nonspecialist. It should be of interest to the educated lay person and, in my view, required for Christology courses in seminaries, colleges, and universities throughout the country.

Lois Malcolm
Luther Seminary

van Buren, Paul M., *According to the Scriptures: The Origins of the Gospel and of the Church's Old Testament*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998. Pp. 147. \$16.00.

As the title suggests, van Buren's thesis is an ambitious one, covering both the question of the origin of the first gospel message in the early church and an understanding of the place of the Old Testament, both in the first century and in the contemporary church. He unpacks this understanding by dividing the book into two sections. The first section focuses on the formation of the emergence of the story of the first gospel. The second section concentrates on how the Old Testament is the sacred text of two distinct communities, Jewish and Christian, with two very different readings of that scripture.

The first section poses a series of interesting questions. First, what is the shape and content of the gospel that, Paul says, he inherited? Van Buren is not

concerned with the more holistic formulations seen in the Q source, but in the initial proclamations (1 Cor 15:3-5, Rom 1:1b-4, and Phil 2:5b-11) of the early church. He tries to uncover the early church's understanding of the death and resurrection appearances of Jesus of Nazareth.

In particular, van Buren asks how the early church came to understand the connection between Jesus of Nazareth and the Messiah or Son of God and how the events of Easter can to be understood as sacrificial or atoning. In making his case, the author relies heavily on the work of several biblical scholars (for example: Brown, Fitzmyer, Dahl, Juel, and Levenson). While this is probably the only way to cover so much ground in a small book, it could be a troubling procedure for some readers.

Van Buren's central point concerns how the events, now known as Easter, can to be understood as sacrificial. It is here that he introduces the connection of the early church to first-century Jewish interpretation. Instead of atonement being a theology of Pauline invention, van Buren argues that Paul inherited this concept of Jesus' death and resurrection, and that the idea came directly from Jewish midrashic activity concerning a popular understanding of the *agedah* or binding of Isaac. He notes that the idea of sacrifice for the whole of Israel based on the Isaac story had been applied to the martyrs of the Maccabean revolt. As a result, this idea was not new to the early church, but an adaption of a first-century Jewish tradition already being circulated.

In the second section of the book, he focuses on this "dual" understanding of both the Old and New Testaments. His goal is to show that the New Testament is a product of the scripture of its time, developed as the first witness to the events of Jesus's death and using that scripture to articulate this event. Van Buren focuses almost exclusively on this dominant theme of Christian faith, understanding the sayings and life of Jesus as important but not having the same centrality as the Easter message. He asserts that there is no understanding of any of this message without hearing it as an interpretation of the scriptures, developed through a first-century Jewish lens.

Van Buren's aim is a noble one: to understand that the Christian faith is not so different or innovative over and against the Jewish tradition of the time and that it is now time to admit that we both share the same sacred scripture with two different or dual readings. Jews stand in a separate tradition, but nevertheless have as much claim to be the people of God as do Christians.

Throughout this second section, van Buren demands that we read the Old Testament in a "dual" way for the two traditions, that is, there is a Jewish way to read the scriptures and a Christian way. While this is true, the end result of

his work is that these two traditions remain two different streams. For example, he contends that Christians read the Old Testament christologically—referring to Jesus. But the Old Testament is also about God, and we can read the Old Testament for a word about another manifestation of the Trinity. We could focus on the differences in readings as van Buren has, that is, understanding the Messiah in two different ways—one Jewish and the other Christian; or we could see the connection between the Passover meal (salvation event in the Exodus) and the Lord's Supper (salvation event of the cross) with its message about the God of both the Greeks and the Jews. Van Buren never offers a shared reading of God and the events of salvation in the First Testament.

Ambitious in its scope, this book brings the reflections of a systematic theologian into conversation with current biblical scholarship, and for this the book is to be praised for opening new horizons for reflection. In addition, van Buren challenges the church of the twenty-first century to envision the people of God as inclusive instead of exclusive. Although a small book on this vast topic will not provide the detail that most readers would desire, it indicates an important direction for the conversation between systematic theology and biblical studies in the future.

Beth LaNeel Tanner
New Brunswick Theological Seminary

Hayes, John M., ed. *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*. 2 Vols. Nashville: Abington, 1999. Pp. 653; 675. \$195.00.

Edited by John M Hayes, professor of Old Testament at Candler School of Theology, Emory University, Atlanta, these two volumes comprise an encyclopedic reference work on the theory and practice of biblical interpretation over the ages down to the present. It contains three types of articles. There are, of course, (1) essays on the history of the interpretation of each of the canonical books of scripture as well as of all of the apocryphal/deuterocanonical books. (2) There are essays on hundreds of individual scholars, earlier and modern (including several who are still living), who have made significant contributions to biblical interpretation. In this area, no work can be exhaustive and differences of opinion would result in varying lists of entries. According to the editor, the primary principles of selection were the importance of the person's contributions and the representative character of his or her work. (3) A third category of articles includes review and discussion of various methods and movements that have influenced and informed the study of scripture. Each entry includes extensive bibliographic information.

With over one thousand signed articles from 397 contributors, the collection is ecumenical, drawing on Jewish, Protestant, Eastern Orthodox, and Roman Catholic scholarship. It is also international, including African, Australian, European, Middle Eastern, and North American scholars.

Besides informative articles on such standard subjects as literary criticism, textual criticism, and rhetorical criticism, there are others on music and the Bible, maps and the biblical world, the quest of the historical Jesus, and the Bible and Western literature. In addition, there is a wide range of articles in specialized approaches to and interpretations of the Bible. These include a lengthy article on feminist interpretation as well as shorter articles on womanist biblical interpretation, liberation theology, Afrocentric biblical interpretation, cross-cultural biblical interpretation, and separate articles on Armenian, Ethiopian, and [Eastern] Orthodox biblical interpretation. Besides psychology and biblical studies, as well as sociology and biblical studies, one can also consult discussions of postcolonial biblical interpretation, postmodern biblical interpretation, structuralism and deconstruction, and psychoanalytic interpretation. Still further afield, one finds articles on electronic hermeneutics as well as Quranic and Islamic interpretation of biblical materials.

Although the price of the two volumes may appear to be high, it should be mentioned that the page size of the volumes is large (7×10 inches) and each of the 1328 pages of text contains about a thousand words in two columns. When these features are taken into account, the cost appears to be more in line with the value of a resource that will doubtless remain a standard work of reference for years to come. Scholars in biblical studies and in related fields, graduate and theological students, clergy and laity involved in interpreting scripture within congregations and communities, and individuals seeking information on a wide range of subjects pertaining to the Bible will be helped by consulting this dictionary, which provides a broad span of articles, each detailed yet concisely formulated.

Bruce M. Metzger
Princeton Theological Seminary

Johnson, Luke Timothy. *Religious Experience in Earliest Christianity: A Missing Dimension in New Testament Studies*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998. Pp. 199. \$20.00.

Scholars avoid discussing "experience" when they write about early Christianity. Luke Johnson is sadly on target with this judgment, and I heartily commend his attempt to correct this omission in the present volume. Early Christians were neither historians nor theologians; they were sentient

persons who experienced new feelings that they understood to be gifts from the outside. If scholars wish to be true to their texts, they must attempt to understand and describe such feelings.

But what *is* this experience or experiences? We have only texts, and the authors of these texts are not primarily interested in describing their religious experiences. At the beginning, Johnson asserts that the texts relate experiences to *power*, which is thought to come from outside of the believer, while it works internally for the "transformation of human freedom." This power is, of course, linked with talk about the Holy Spirit. Much later on, Johnson comes to lean on a famous definition of *religious* experience by Joachim Wach in which such experience is said to refer to what is ultimate.

The author eschews any attempt at comprehensiveness and focuses on three specific phenomena: baptism, glossolalia, and the Eucharist. The elusiveness and complexity of the subject make it difficult for me always to be sure exactly what he is about. I hazard the following judgments, which can be based on his own words. The experience of baptism is ultimately a "mystical identification" with the crucified and resurrected Lord and results in a "form of status enhancement." Glossolalia involves experiences of "release, freedom, and joy" (although here the author is referring to contemporary glossolalia). The Eucharist made possible a "fellowship with . . . the risen and living Lord Jesus." This last phrase points to what the author in his epilogue says is a major—if implicit—argument of his entire book: Early Christians "considered themselves caught up by, defined by, a power not in their control but rather controlling them, a power that derived from the crucified and raised Messiah Jesus."

A book that describes early Christian experiences is indeed sorely needed. I am not sure Johnson has yet written such a book. At the least, I find his arguments confusing. Despite his stated purpose, the author devotes many pages to "academic" polemic against other authors, notably Jonathan Z. Smith, Burton Mack, and Graydon Snyder. Johnson obviously finds the conclusions of these scholars distasteful, but it is not always clear to me just why. Despite his avowed attempt to produce a "phenomenological" study, he devotes much of his effort to typical scholarly and historical pursuits. For example, the chapter on baptism is focused on the argument that the gentile believers reflected in Galatians and Colossians expected not just one initiation rite but several. This is an interesting possibility, but the author does not then devote himself to getting at the *experience* of initiation, either as one or many.

The author also fails to discuss the ambiguity of the relationships among *human*, *religious*, and *Christian* experience. The book is entitled *Religious*

Experience, but chapter 2 is labeled "Getting at Christian Experience." The ambiguity is heightened by the fact that it is in this chapter that he cites Wach's definition of *religious* (i.e. generic) experience. So what after all is he after? One could rest more easily with these dilemmas had he really described the experience of early believers, but such description is not found in any sustained way. While sentences here and there are provocative and suggestive, Johnson does not develop them. For example, despite his early assertion that he is interested in experiences associated with power, he does not in any systematic way describe what that "power" feels like and what it does. He is convinced that Christian experience is associated with the resurrected Jesus, but I have no idea from reading his book what that might mean.

I recommend this book to readers, not because it provides the answers I, at least, would seek from such a study. What it does is to pose issues and reveal problems that threaten to entrap the investigator in this crucial but mazelike area of study. Now that Johnson has cleared the ground with this prolegomena-like volume, I hope he will describe in a subsequent volume the rich flora of Christian experiences.

Robin Scroggs
Union Theological Seminary

Wharton, James A. *Job*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999. Pp. 191. \$16.00.

James Wharton has written a good, balanced, moderate, faith-oriented book on the complex and ever-intriguing biblical book of Job. Though one may disagree with his interpretation of specific passages from Job, he is careful to present differing opinions and makes a good argument for his own position. In some cases, he is willing to let the ambiguity remain without attempting to solve difficult questions.

The following are examples of some characteristics of his book. (1) He is clear from the beginning what he thinks is the proper function of the book of Job within the holy scriptures. It has "never been to provide answers to the questions it raises." Rather, it functions "as a means of keeping the questions urgent and contemporary" for those who honor the God of whom the Bible speaks. This reviewer concurs with that understanding.

(2) Wharton sees parallels between Job as "the servant of the Lord" and the suffering servant of Isaiah. Though this connection is not explored in depth, it seems to be an important component in his understanding of Job. He makes passing reference to it at various points in the book.

(3) Wharton makes some changes in the usual ordering of the three cycles (he calls them "rounds of discourse") of dialogue between Job and his three friends. In each case, he begins with Job (chapters 3, 12, and 21) rather than Eliphaz. He also deals with all three of Eliphaz's speeches at once before continuing with Job's response in chapters 6–7 and the first speeches of Bildad and Zophar. This allows one to look at all of the words of Eliphaz as if they were one speech. The problem is that it was not all one speech (much was said and something happened between each speech). It seems to this reviewer that this method obscures the change in Eliphaz's pastoral approach to Job as the dialogues unfold.

(4) Wharton is well aware of problems in reading Job as an uninterrupted unit, especially with regard to the prologue and epilogue, the wisdom poem in chapter 28, the Elihu speeches (chapters 32–37), and possibly the second God speech (chapters 40–41). Following many contemporary scholars, he is less concerned with the process of forming the book of Job from various sources than with a careful reading of Job as it has been handed down to us.

(5) He provides some interesting perspectives on the epilogue as he tries to put the best construction on the value of this often denigrated conclusion to Job.

Wharton is knowledgeable about Job scholarship. He mentions areas of contention, summarizes the key issues, but does not delve into complex scholarly discussions. His book is very readable and would certainly be helpful to a student of Job who needs a little assistance to order the questions and make sense out of them. He writes clearly. One need not be an academic to follow the clarity of his presentation. This book fits well the intention of the Westminster Bible Companion and is a worthy addition to that series.

Daniel Simundson
Luther Seminary

Jeremias, Jörg. *The Book of Amos: A Commentary*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998. Pp. 177. \$26.00.

Jeremias, who teaches Old Testament at the University of Marburg, is well-known in Old Testament scholarship, especially for his recent work on the minor prophets. The present volume is a translation of a German original that appeared in 1995. It also follows hard upon, interacts with, and depends heavily on Jeremias' earlier study: *Hosea und Amos: Studien zu den Anfängen des Dodekapropheten*.

Even with a small commentary such as this, one cannot hope to do full justice to its detailed and rich contents. Perhaps it will be most beneficial, therefore, to comment on Jeremias' basic presuppositions regarding the composition of Amos and his methodological approach. He states the former clearly in the preface: "The present commentary is shaped by the conviction that the book of Amos in all its parts already presupposes the fall of the Northern Kingdom and over considerable stretches also that of the Southern Kingdom, Judah." Jeremias' methodological approach to such a situation is subsequently explicated at the conclusion of his introduction:

This state of affairs implies that within the book of Amos itself the modern exegete must deal first of all with the exilic/postexilic history of transmission of Amos' message. Any attempt to get back to earlier strata of the book, not to speak of Amos' actual words themselves, is necessarily burdened by a (variously differing) degree of uncertainty.

Few exegetes would dispute Jeremias' opinion on the composition of Amos. It is now assumed that virtually every portion of the Hebrew Bible—prophetic or not—was redacted in periods subsequent to the "original" author or community responsible for that text. What many theorists *would* dispute, however, are two key assumptions that impact Jeremias' commentary throughout.

First, despite Jeremias' observation that a reconstruction of the preexilic message of Amos is complicated "and in many instances only hypothetical," this insight does not prevent him from engaging in elaborate discussions of the composition history of Amos. Furthermore, at times, Jeremias does seem to be on a quest to recover the "authentic" Amos insofar as exilic and postexilic redactions are offset by italic type in the translations. The identification of some texts as late glosses, their separate treatment, and their assignment to particular periods significantly impact their subsequent interpretation. And, despite the fact that Jeremias avers that his treatment of these glosses separately (both in typeface and in the comment section) is done "without implying any theological value judgments," one gets the sense—especially as the comment on such glosses is often quite brief—that he doth protest too much.

This raises the second point, which is much more basic and critical: even if the book of Amos does stem from the exilic and postexilic periods, so much so that contemporary interpretation of the book must begin with the history of the transmission of the book from these periods, Jeremias seems unaware that

the problematics involved in reconstructing the "original Amos" also inhere to any attempt at identifying glosses, sources, redactions, and so forth. This latter attempt, no less than the former, therefore, is hypothetical and plagued by uncertainties. Jeremias' analysis does not reflect such an awareness; instead, it seems to betray an extreme confidence in a rather dicey task, often eschewing any explanation as to how Jeremias knows that a particular text is exilic or postexilic. Moreover, even when explanations are given they are often brief and unsatisfactory. At still other points, Jeremias seems to pull back from the redaction-critical argument because of the broader textual context but such a move could obviously be made with almost every one of his redactional arguments!

In fairness to Jeremias, he is unquestionably a gifted interpreter. The commentary, while heavily—probably even overly—dependent on redaction-critical analyses, is not without theological, literary, and canonical discussions. When these are present—for example, in Jeremias' discussion of the ring-composition of 5:1–17, his treatment of "the good" (ethics) and election, or his interconnections with Hosea or the Book of the Twelve—the material is always evocative and insightful, even profound. It is unfortunate, therefore, that these elements were forced to take a back seat to Jeremias' redaction-critical concerns.

In sum, this volume is an important work, especially on the composition of Amos, and a fine compendium of recent, particularly German, work on Amos. Still, the redaction-critical assumptions upon which it is based are speculative and debatable. Hence, the volume will prove most useful to the scholar and student; readers who want to consult a commentary primarily for theological and/or literary insights into the book of Amos will probably want to look elsewhere, especially to the still not-yet-replaced volume by James Luther Mays. It is to be hoped that the publisher will keep both commentaries in print.

Brent A. Strawn
Asbury Theological Seminary

Neyrey, Jerome H. *Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998. Pp. 287. \$26.00.

Because biblical studies so long neglected even an elementary engagement with cultural anthropology, the publishing channels are now clogged with a surfeit of studies of honor and shame, clients and patrons, and liminality. The sheer number of these books might engender a cynical dismissal of the entire

topic as a mere interpretive fad, but such a dismissal would miss important critical arguments and insights that social theory contributes to the study of the Bible. Jerome Neyrey has been one of the pioneers of this interpretive approach, and here he turns his attention to the cultural background that would enable modern readers more appropriately to understand Matthew's Gospel.

As Neyrey emphasizes, Jesus and Matthew inhabited a world where a constant, subtle struggle for status constituted an inescapable element of everyday life. Readers who ignore the subtext of honor and shame are liable to miss much of the richness of biblical narrative. Neyrey expounds the vital importance of cultural sensitivity in interpreting Matthew, addressing some of the complaints that critics have raised about the ways biblical scholarship has adopted cultural anthropology, and insisting that the cultural code of honor and shame provides the indispensable context for understanding the genre of Matthew, the passion narrative, and the Sermon on the Mount.

The first chapter introduces the ubiquity of the rhetoric of honor and shame in Hellenistic antiquity. Neyrey cites anthropological authorities, ancient rhetorical textbooks, and biblical and nonbiblical examples to make the case that participants in ancient social life were necessarily entwined in struggles over public recognition of honor and shame. The second chapter then proposes a template for reading Matthew in the cultural context Neyrey has just sketched.

Succeeding chapters develop a thorough description of the narrative encomium, the rhetorical genre appropriate for establishing a character's blameworthiness or praiseworthiness. Neyrey demonstrates the cultural currency of the model of the encomium, then shows the extent to which Matthew fits that model through his representation of Jesus' birth and early life, his adult ministry, and especially through the apparent degradation of the passion narrative. In a concluding section, the author analyzes the Sermon on the Mount in terms of the cultural context he has described.

Neyrey establishes beyond the shadow of a doubt that, to the extent that conventional biblical scholars have overlooked the pertinence of honor/shame social discourses, they have missed much of significance to Matthew and to Jesus. At the same time, the book suffers from some frustrating characteristics. Perhaps motivated by the resistance some cultural studies have met in biblical scholars, he makes his points with copious repetition and occasional overstatement. Some citations from the rhetorical literature appear three or four times (he quotes Aristotle's *Rhetoric* 1.5.9 on pages 10, 26, 82, and 84), a gesture that risks inciting doubt as much as it instills confidence.

Likewise, at several points, Neyrey seems to push arguments beyond his evidence. In discussing the Matthean infancy narrative, for instance, he concedes that Matthew lacks the sort of material that would strengthen his case, but then goes on to bolster his case that Matthew offers encomiastic rhetoric by citing the *Lukan* infancy stories. The book would have been much stronger had it been trimmed of repetition, with somewhat more modest ambitions, for such a work would have made a more compelling case for reading with the cultural perspective that Neyrey understands so well. As it is, the book repays patient, critical reading with a variety of insights into the Matthean cultural world.

A. K. M. Adam

Seabury-Western Theological Seminary

Neusner, Jacob, and Bruce Chilton. *Jewish-Christian Debates: God, Kingdom, Messiah*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998. Pp. 240. \$24.00.

This book stands as a companion to a three-volume series by the same authors. While the earlier series dealt with what Judaism and Christianity *say* about the topics of revelation, people of God, and God in the world, the current volume compares how the two religions *work* in terms of communion with God, the kingdom of God, and the mystery of the Messiah. Both authors focus on the formative documents of their respective traditions, the dual Torah for Judaism and the New Testament for Christianity. The book's structure, which allows for a presentation and response on each of the three themes by each author, serves well to elucidate differences and uncover ground for conversation.

Throughout the book, Neusner displays the process of dialectical argumentation by which Jews meet God in the Torah. His lively explication of property law (including wonderfully earthy questions such as whether one is responsible for damage caused by piling up manure in front of one's door) reveals the way in which Jews find the very rationality of God in the logic of the Talmud. Neusner rejects the Christian caricatures of Torah obedience as "legalism" and instead deftly demonstrates how the practices of Jewish faith—celebrating the festivals, observing the sabbath, walking in the way (*Halakhah*), and reciting the prayers—inscribe Jews into a cosmic narrative of creation, revelation, and redemption. Finally, Neusner describes the way in which Israelite obedience beyond the call of the law, that is, the radically free giving of the self to God and others (*zekhut*), will evoke from God (in God's

time) the radically free gift of the Messiah—a reciprocity of “responsive grace.”

As Neusner looks to the Torah as the center of Jewish life and faith, so Chilton, in turn, looks to Jesus as the center of his description of Christianity. He presents Christian communion with God as an identification with Christ in baptism, prayer, ethical imitation, and Eucharist. He goes on to trace the development of the New Testament’s descriptions of the kingdom of God as ultimate, transcendent, perfect, holy, and inclusive—highlighting the centrality of Jesus as the harbinger of and the means of access to this kingdom. Finally, he traces the development of Christology from Peter’s confession of Jesus as the Messiah to the Johanne conviction of Jesus’ ontological unity with the Father.

One of the strengths of this volume is the willingness of the authors to admit differences without trying to construct an ersatz “religious core” underneath the particular claims of each tradition (a theological night in which all cats are grey). Invocations of tolerance or “many paths to the same God” are eschewed in favor of careful theological descriptions and serious listening to the voice of the other. The authors share the conviction that Judaism and Christianity have enough in common to allow for mutual understanding and fruitful comparison without appeal to a metareligious theory to underwrite their dialogue. Thus, this book takes its place alongside a growing number of works that take seriously the need for Christians and Jews not only to understand each other, but to learn from each other.

Unfortunately, while Neusner’s descriptions of Judaism evoke a rich and attractive pattern of life, Chilton’s readings of New Testament Christianity are too often bogged down in literary, historical, and source-critical concerns. By dividing the New Testament into a multiplicity of “stages” and “phases” of development, Chilton fragments the story and thus fails to present a single coherent Christian vision that would parallel Neusner’s description of Judaism. Further, Chilton does not sufficiently respond to Neusner’s charge that Christianity is an over-spiritualized reduction of Judaism that gave way to the “worldly government of emperors.” Rather, Chilton presents Christianity as a largely individualized, “metasocial,” and otherworldly faith. For instance, he reads the Lord’s Prayer not as a political appeal (“thy kingdom come”) or an economic hope (“give us this day our daily bread”), but as an explication of Christian consciousness. By attending to Neusner’s concerns, Chilton might have been challenged to read the New Testament along more communal and social lines, thus offering a critique of privatized Christianity and the political

compromises of Christendom. Nonetheless, this book is a welcome contribution to Jewish-Christian conversations that seek both the revitalization of the church and to the strengthening of Israel.

Scott Bader-Saye
University of Scranton

Suarez, Oscar S. *Protestantism and Authoritarian Politics: The Politics of Repression and the Future of Ecumenical Witness in the Philippines*. Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1999. Pp. 223.

This book, built upon a Princeton Seminary Ph.D. dissertation, is one of the first attempts by a Philippine Protestant churchman to reflect theologically on the social witness of the church in the Marcos dictatorship, 1972 to 1989. Oscar Suarez is pastor of Cosmopolitan Church in Manila and teaches Theology in Union Theological Seminary at Dasmariñas.

The book falls into two parts. The first deals with the history of the encounter. The stage is set by Senator Jovito Salonga, whose forward provides a solid account of the political events of the period, in which he, as the country's most prominent Protestant political leader, a leader in the opposition to Marcos and President of the Philippine Senate, played a major role. Suarez then devotes two chapters to a historical review of what he calls the "ideological captivity" of Protestant churches during this century to American culture and politicoeconomic dominance. He follows this with a detailed analysis of the attempt by the National Council of Churches in the Philippines to focus issues of social justice, freedom of speech, and human rights during the Marcos regime, and the controversy within the Protestant churches that this evoked. That controversy focused on the relation between "ideological" analysis of political wrongs and basic Christian affirmations about sin and salvation. It is a cautionary tale for Americans: a remarkably civil, gentler form of what might arise if some Marcos were to declare martial law in this country.

In the second part of the book, Suarez wrestles with the task of a theology for the church in the sociopolitical life of his country. He draws on many sources: sociologists (Manfred Halpern of Princeton University), Catholics (mainly liberation theologians), Protestants (From Visser 't Hooft to Míguez-Bonino), and expressions of faith from his own Filipino context. Some basic themes operate in this exposition: transformation of the church, of persons, and of the society in Christ; discovery of the "sacred core" of Filipino life; and a drive for human wholeness as promised and given by God in Christ. They do not yet form a fully coherent theology. Some themes are missing, most

notably those that belong to the crucifixion event: sin, repentance, forgiveness, and living with faith and hope in a world not yet redeemed. Nevertheless, this is an expression of constructive theological reflection in the context of a society that is not Western, and for which transformation is a matter of life and death. It is part of the ecumenical dialogue that is shaping the future of the church's mission.

Charles C. West
Princeton Theological Seminary

Cowles, Ben Thomson. *Through the Dragon's Mouth: Journeys into the Yangzi Gorges*. Cowles. Santa Barbara, CA: Fithian, 1999. Pp. 319. \$24.95.

This is a remarkable book. The author, who was an American Presbyterian missionary in China in 1946, tells the story of his adventurous journey through the gorges of the Yangzi River in that year. The story is lively and often exciting. The people he met and talked with on the way are quoted directly in long passages. Through them, we are given insight into Chinese psychology and belief systems, and expositions of ancient traditions and legends. From this isolated area comes a revelation of Chinese life much as it was lived before the impact of the West. The account is interesting not only for what it tells about China, but also what it reveals of the attitudes of many missionaries of that period as seen in the example of this young man.

The author's heart goes out to the incredibly oppressed and impoverished oarsmen and trackers who rowed and pulled his boat up the river. The paralysis of the Nationalist government, following its victory over the Japanese, and the savage attacks it mounted against any outspoken critics are revealed. Against this background, the eventual triumph of the Communists can be better understood.

Stops along the river included visits to some mission stations of the China Inland Mission and of the Roman Catholics. The book reports not only the work of these missions but also the personalities and attitudes of the missionaries and their ways of presenting the Christian message. All missionaries were agreed that they must work chiefly at building up the Chinese church. We are given vignettes of the Chinese church leaders, both women and men, and the backgrounds out of which they came to Christianity. The young and enthusiastic teachers in the China Inland Mission school provide a particularly stirring example of hopefulness and determination in the face of an apparently hopeless national situation.

Today, the missions are gone and the gorges will soon be obliterated by the

great dam that is being built. It is good to have this record of them as they were in earlier days.

Charles W. Forman
Yale Divinity School

Wogaman, J. Phillip. *Speaking the Truth in Love: Prophetic Preaching to a Broken World*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998. Pp. 209. \$12.00.

If you are looking for a volume that both instructs and models how to address prophetic themes in the pulpit, this book is a fine choice. J. Philip Wogaman brings two remarkably important gifts to the task. First, as Senior Minister of Foundry United Methodist Church in Washington, DC (a congregation that has included both the Clintons and the Doles as well as other more ordinary parishioners), Wogaman is committed to a prophetic pulpit ministry. Second, as a former professor of Christian Ethics for twenty-five years at Wesley Theological Seminary in DC, he knows the issues. Put together, his treatment of the subject of prophetic preaching is pointed and careful; the sermon manuscripts reveal a preacher both sensitive and courageous.

Wogaman's writing, it should be noted, operates within the "traditional theory" modality of preaching (as described by Lucy Rose in *Sharing the Word*). Issues are treated thematically, the homiletical purpose is to persuade by convincing argument, and scripture serves to prompt and/or undergird the topical treatment. Sermonic content tends toward propositional truths, including explanation and illustration. Sermonic shape is often deductive in form. The sermon manuscripts (as well as his preached sermons) reflect prophetic particularity in the context of pastoral compassion. Here is rhetorical homiletical address in winsome style, together with sage advice about how to do it. He is a powerful traditional preacher.

He does not evidence familiarity with the various forms of the "new homiletic"—such as inductive, narrative, or phenomenological "move" preaching. Hence, his advice presumes an unstated theoretical base that, likely, will not always capture the imagination of many younger North American preachers. Likewise, his work would be aided by recent theoretical work on the parables, particularly as it illumines metaphoric meaning. My sense is that Wogaman's book would be enhanced by inclusion of the voice of Walter Brueggemann, whose *Prophetic Imagination* is far more comprehensive in theoretical scope.

Clearly, Wogaman is a pastor's pastor here—insightful, focused, strong, and kind. The way he manages to connect biblical texts (often lectionary-based and chosen a year in advance) with crucial issues of the moment is

superb, revealing serendipitous pulpit power. The section on the relation of the pastoral to the prophetic is particularly strong. Pastors who intend for the pulpit to be relevant will find courage and wisdom here.

Eugene L. Lowry
Saint Paul School of Theology

Killinger, John. *Preaching the New Millennium*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1999. Pp. 158. \$15.00.

The introduction to this text declares, "If you are not a good preacher during the waning months of the old millennium and the first months of the new one, you never will be." Killinger, who has always exhibited a lively and pastoral interest in the people in the pews, considers the transition into a new millennium an "almost unparalleled experience" and a rare opportunity for preachers to address a topic on the minds of nearly everyone. I am not quite convinced that, for most people, profound thoughts and emotions lie beneath the hype anticipating the year 2000. Nevertheless, I appreciate this and any call for preachers to take their pulpit ministries seriously and to attempt to speak a timely word. The times in which we live, like most times, are characterized by change. Killinger wisely and faithfully calls preachers to proclaim the timeless gospel in the specific context of those changes. As preachers do that, every Sunday presents an opportunity for people of faith to encounter God anew.

Four chapters comprise the heart of this resource. The opening chapter looks briefly at the passing of the year 1000 as a time of little expectation. Killinger presents a convincing case that few people alive at the close of the last millennium were filled with or shaken by eschatological concerns. Chapter 2 then contrasts that relative calm with the variety of opinions and expectations expressed today as we draw near to the year 2000. He particularly notes the stark contrast between the way some timidly approach the new millennium with fear and depression whereas others boldly await it with excitement and anticipation. Killinger does his best work here, as he calls for preachers to declare a clear word of gospel that will evoke hope in all who hear. The next chapter surveys eight scriptural paradigms that can provide direction and insight for preachers: "creation and creativity"; "journey"; "jubilee"; "returning to the tabernacle"; "the cross, the Resurrection, and new life"; "fellowship and community"; "sacrifice and service"; and "the city of God." Their brevity makes these discussions more appetizers than entrees, but preachers who take the time to reflect on them can prepare hearty meals

for their hearers. In the fourth chapter, Killinger discusses how years of responding to the challenges and opportunities of ministry can leave the preacher spiritually drained. As preachers experience or anticipate this, he advises them to work to create within themselves a renewed sense of wonder.

A series of six sermons completes this resource. Since the third chapter outlined eight biblical paradigms, I expected eight sermons. In the second sermon, I deeply lament the way Killinger pits Ecclesiastes against Paul in a fashion always detrimental to the former. Nevertheless, as these messages attempt to follow the advice of the preceding chapters and evoke hope that is based on gospel assurances, they provide worthwhile moments of reflection and inspiration.

The greatest strength of this book lies in its call for preachers to speak a word of reassuring hope during times when some fall to their knees in despair and others seek a comfortable seat in which to be entertained. That focus on the hope of the gospel and on preachers as harbingers of hope, along with a pastoral plea for preachers to pay attention to their spiritual lives and the devotional moments offered by the sermons, makes this a solid and helpful resource no matter what time it is.

Larry Paul Jones
Lexington Theological Seminary

Goslin, Thomas S. II. *Out to Pastor*. Pasadena: Hope, 1999. Pp. 195. \$12.95.

Thomas Goslin's autobiography, *Out to Pastor*, is a refreshing story of what the ministerial calling can be. President Calian of Pittsburgh Seminary, in the introduction, gives something of the sweep when he writes, "Dr. Goslin has successfully filled the role of husband, father, grandparent, pastor, seminary educator, author, missionary, international ecumenist and best of all—he has been throughout a faithful and enthusiastic disciple of Jesus Christ."

I take the liberty of referring to the author as "Tom." This is because he was in the class of '44 and I in the class of '43, and we were both members of the Benham Club at Princeton Seminary.

I learned much from the book about Tom's life not only after our seminary days, but before as well. Tom came to seminary after graduating from Yale where he had received the call to ministry. While at Yale, he studied Spanish, spent the summer of his junior year in Peru, and wrote a paper, "Latin American Reaction to U.S. Imperialism, 1898–1914" that displeased the

professor who read it. After graduating from Princeton Seminary, Tom moved into his varied and productive ministry. He was pastor of two churches, Paulsboro and Millville in south New Jersey, and did graduate study at the University of Pennsylvania.

In 1951, Tom and his wife Julia responded to a request from the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church to go as one of the Board's career missionaries to the Union Theological Seminary in Buenos Aires. His fluency in Spanish was a great asset in his teaching ministry and in his later service in Madrid.

There was a ten-year hiatus between Buenos Aires and Madrid, which found Tom serving as senior pastor at a thriving Presbyterian church in Doylestown, Pennsylvania. Recently, I have met a number of families now residing in a retirement village in nearby Newtown, who, even in their 80s and 90s, warmly remember when Tom was their pastor and strive to keep in touch.

In Madrid, there is an exciting account of the beginning of the post-Franco era, serving as theological educator for the Spanish Evangelical Church, engaging in fruitful ecumenical relations with both Roman Catholics and Protestants, and establishing the Community Church. This latter work is further described in another book by Tom, *The Church without Walls*.

Finally comes the retirement part of Tom's life story, whence comes the title of the book: "There is a folk saying, 'Old preachers never die; they just go out to pastor.'" Tom comments that this has been true for him, and cites examples of preaching engagements, conferences, and community service organizations and councils. This pastor's story is instructive, interesting, enjoyable, and indeed, inspiring reading.

Jack Cooper
Princeton Theological Seminary

Rice, Howard L., and Lamar Williamson Jr., eds. *A Book of Reformed Prayers*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998. Pp. 251. \$15.00.

A Book of Reformed Prayers is what its name suggests, an anthology of prayers from those who have traced their theological heritage to those Protestants who called themselves "Reformed" in the sixteenth century. That movement radiated out of Calvin's sixteenth-century Geneva and into the world, touching a broader circle of Christians. Consequently, the editors have included

prayers not only by classic Reformed leaders such as Zwingli, Farel, Oecolampadius, Bucer, Bullinger, Calvin, and Knox, but also those, who though not Reformed, were strongly affected by Calvin's thought: Navarre (sixteenth-century Roman Catholic), Lewis Bayly (seventeenth-century Anglican), Emily Dickinson, Fosdick, and Rauschenbush (the latter two Baptist), and Brother Roger (once French Reformed, now Roman Catholic).

The collection begins with a valuable introduction entitled, "How Reformed Christians Pray," followed by a chapter devoted to each century, beginning with the sixteenth-century Reformers. Each subsequent chapter begins with a succinct and helpful introduction to the theological concerns and leaders of its period, followed by the text of the prayers. Here one can see the theological issues of the day emerging in worship where *credendi* (what we believe) shapes *orandi* (our prayers)—one of the marks of Reformed prayer. The editors acknowledge the challenge of finding prayers during the first Great Awakening of eighteenth-century America when written prayers were thought improper. However, the chapters become longer as the book progresses into the twentieth century, not only because of the greater availability of texts, but because of the inevitable need of the editors to insure a broad representation of recent diversity.

Better than half of the book is devoted to twentieth-century sources. Here, the qualities of prayers presented can be quite mixed. Because this is an anthology, no theological reflection upon the prayers is included beyond the brief editorial comment made in each chapter's introductory remarks. As the twentieth century unfolds, one is reminded of how "flat" our language could be in the 1960s and how easily the tradition can become prey to ideology, whether the social gospel movement at the beginning of the century or the number of special interest groups pressing their agendas as the corner is turned into the twenty-first century. Yet, even here, there are vivid reminders of the power of faith expressed in prayer, especially in those times and places throughout the world where Reformed Christians have suffered because of the faith.

A concluding chapter recognizes the twin impact of the ecumenical and liturgical renewal movements upon Reformed prayer in this century. This has produced not only an explosion of new services books by various communions, but also an increase in personal collections by poet/theologians such as Baillie, Weems, Shepherd, and others. One curious omission is any recognition or serious discussion of the resurgence in Reformed hymnody in the second half of the twentieth century. This is as much Reformed prayer as any of the other texts included in the last two chapters.

The work concludes with a section of short and helpful biographical notes on the authors whose prayers are included in the book.

Fred R. Anderson
Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church
New York

Erickson, Kathleen Powers. *At Eternity's Gate: The Spiritual Vision of Vincent van Gogh*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998. Pp. 192. \$22.00.

For the Christian who likes to spend time looking at paintings, here is a stimulating book. It gives solid ground for what many of us have always sensed about the wondrous canvasses of van Gogh—here was a fellow believer who found so many beautiful things in the theater of God's glory. According to this author, van Gogh had a very Christian sense of beauty.

As both church historian and art historian, Erickson builds her case that van Gogh came from a home where all the currents of nineteenth-century Protestantism crossed. The artist's father was pastor in the Dutch Reformed church. His uncle was a well-known Amsterdam minister who preached a liberal Jesus. This uncle had been young Vincent's mentor and tutor at the time he studied for his entrance exams for the theological faculty. But there was another side to van Gogh's religious life. He eagerly followed the sermons of Charles H. Spurgeon and even Dwight L. Moody. He had experienced an evangelical conversion and this was what inspired his attempt to be a missionary to the coal miners in Belgium. He was an avid reader of the *Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis, one of the classics of subjective spirituality, whether Protestant or Catholic. There was nothing narrow about van Gogh's spiritual formation. He read Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* and Renan's *Life of Jesus* with equal enthusiasm. For better or for worse, van Gogh was a typical product of nineteenth-century Protestant Christianity.

For the readership of *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin*, Erickson's chapter on van Gogh's repeated failure to qualify for the ministry plucks the strings of our own hearts. We have all too often heard similar stories. On top of that was the sad experience of his unrequited love. From these disappointments, he never recovered. Behind van Gogh's glowing paintings was bitter suffering.

There have always been those who thought van Gogh threw away Christianity and replaced it with art. One often imagines that his leaving the church was some sort of emancipation. Erickson is surely right; that is not what we see in

the pictures. In his last years, he found in Christ a source of hope and to the end looked to him for life everlasting.

Erickson's research into the nature of the artist's mental illness dispels the picture of the insane painter who squeezed paint onto canvas in a mad frenzy. When van Gogh was sick, his illness so incapacitated him that he was unable to paint. It was only in his lucid times that he was able to work. In the end, it was severe depression, a malady that he shared with several other members of his family, that finally drove him to end his own life.

For myself, there has always been a struggle as to whether my vocation was to be a painter rather than a preacher. It is a good book that gets one thinking over one's own life from a new perspective. What if I had failed to get into seminary? What if I had been dismissed from my first charge? These are subjective questions, no less subjective than looking at a painting and finding it opening new trails of meaning. This book helps do just that. It helps us look deeply within and find the artist in ourselves. Erickson's carefully researched interpretations of a good number of van Gogh's major paintings are often very convincing, not that other interpretations cannot be suggested as well. Even at that, Erickson understands that van Gogh's vision is profoundly Christian, something more than a few of us have long sensed, but the value of this book is that now we have historical substance to support our aesthetic intuition.

Hughes Oliphant Old
Princeton Theological Seminary

Finney, Paul Corby, ed. *Seeing Beyond the Word: Visual Arts and the Calvinist Tradition*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999. Pp. 540. \$65.00.

The subject matter of this collection of articles and essays will immediately catch the attention of all who associate Calvinism with iconoclasm. The fruit of a conference held at the Center of Theological Inquiry in Princeton in May 1995, the volume offers a wide-ranging picture of many different ways that the Reformed tradition, especially its Calvinist stream, has been related to the visual arts.

Included in the volume are both essays that provide an overview of Calvinism and art in particular countries or regions, and detailed investigations of specific forms of art, especially metal work, painting, and architecture. In terms of geographic breadth, the collection covers major parts of Europe

(with special notice of Calvin's own France), and some parts of North America (particularly the Puritans' world). In terms of time frame, the collection covers the more than four-and-a-half centuries from Calvin's Geneva to the present; the major focus of attention is the mid-sixteenth to early eighteenth centuries in Europe, although the discussions of Hungary and North America devote more space to the modern period. The authors of the individual pieces are equally diverse, including historians of institutions, art, theology, and liturgy, from Europe and North America. One very attractive feature of this substantial book is the number of illustrations: forty-six color plates and 174 black-and-white photographs.

Because the collection is both large and rich, it is not possible to note, much less discuss, all the entries, so the reviewer is left to choose some topics that may pique the readers' curiosity. One of the most intriguing sections is devoted to France; Raymond Mentzer's article describes, among other things, the arrangement of Reformed church buildings and their furnishings. For example, how many modern Christians have ever considered where church pews originated? In fact, the introduction of congregational seating was first a Protestant practice developed because of the importance of preaching in Protestant worship. The sections on France, Hungary, England, and North America, give particular attention to Reformed architecture: the shape and style of the spaces where the church gathers have always been among the most significant visual art interests of Reformed Christians, for whom function has both theological and aesthetic value.

Another important factor in the history of Calvinism and the visual arts has been the question of the theological relationship of the Reformed tradition to the arts. That theme is a running motif throughout most of this book, though it comes to clearest expression in specific articles, particularly that of Daniel Hardy, the several concerned with Calvin's portrait and Beza's illustrations of the Reformers, and those on Netherlandish painting.

As with any volume, one can identify quibbles or significant omissions. The designation "Calvinism" poses one such quibble. Hardy, Philip Benedict, and James Tanis remark on the wider Reformed tradition explicitly, but in general the reference to "Calvinism" is—perhaps intentionally?—vague, and contributes to continuing a somewhat unbalanced perception of the relationship between Calvin and the rest of the tradition that bears his name. Second, given the role of the Decalogue in Calvin's theology and its relevance for this subject matter, more attention to that topic would have been helpful. The Reformed, especially Calvinist, understanding of the division of the two tables

of the Decalogue was both distinctive and significant in the sixteenth century, and the fact that Decalogue tables were common church decorations (also a distinctive feature of Calvinist churches) would suggest that a fraction more historical theology could add a dimension to the discussion of Calvinism and the visual arts. Third, it is a sad commentary that no visual arts from Calvinism outside the European-based cultures were included; perhaps we need a companion book on global Calvinism and the arts.

This handsome book is completed with a number of useful indices, including a separate index of artists. Editor Corby Finney and Eerdmans Publishing Company have done a real service to all those interested in Reformed Christianity and/or religion and art, by providing this rich and varied feast for the eyes and for the mind.

Elsie McKee
Princeton Theological Seminary

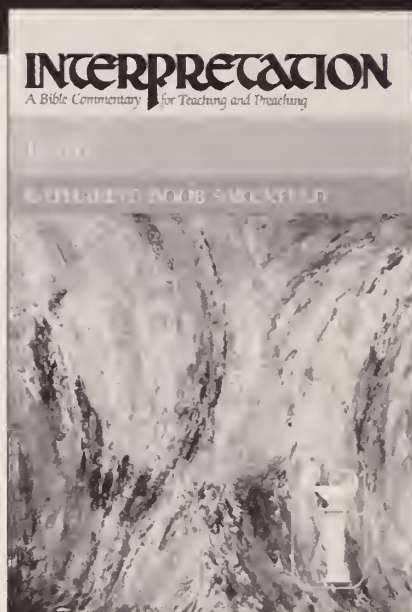
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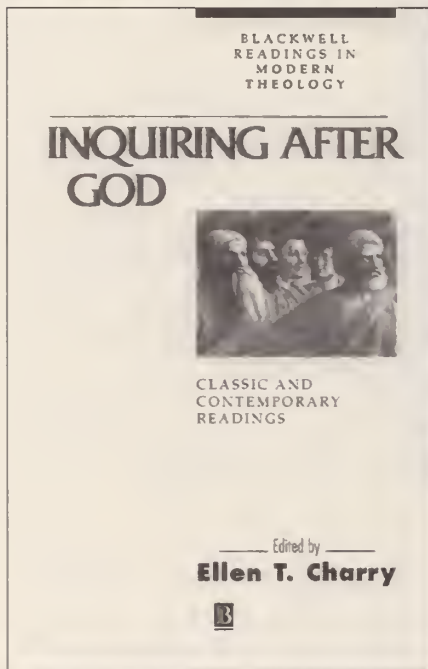
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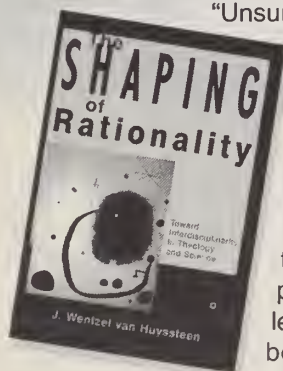
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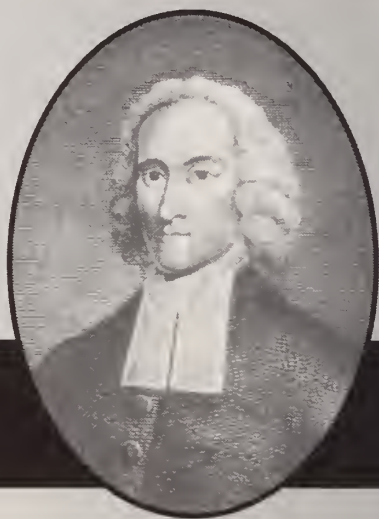
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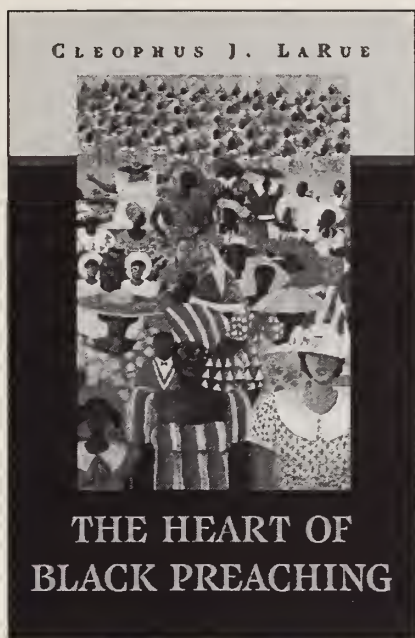
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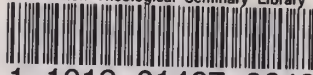
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